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THE

MINISTERIAL CHARACTER

OF

CHRIST

PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

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BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

A New Edition, Revised and Enlarged.

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

It is the object of the following pages to examine a part of our Lord's mediatorial character, which seems to have attracted less attention than any other leading topic connected with his ministry.

The separation of that character into three distinct divisions, is at once the most scriptural, and the most comprehensive that can be followed.

The inspired description of the *priesthood* of Christ, which occupies the greater

part of the epistle to the Hebrews, has been illustrated in all the branches of its sacrificial and intercessory duties, with a particularity which was due to its primary importance.

His *kingly office*, connected as it is with his divinity, and with all the subjects relating to the extent and nature of his spiritual empire, present and future, has also afforded materials for many practical as well as doctrinal remarks.

Much improvement may likewise be derived from an attentive study of our Lord's *prophetical* character. In the view of that portion of it which has been attempted in this volume, it has formed no part of my design to inquire into the terms of the divine revelation which he

declared to the world. My aim has been to delineate the manner of his personal preaching—so far as a comparison of the gospels will supply its outline—by a practical examination of some of the principal features of his ministerial character.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THIS EDITION.

In preparing this edition of the Ministerial Character of Christ for the press, the author has availed himself of the opportunity of inserting four new chapters, and of making considerable additions in the other parts of the volume.

If any of the considerations suggested in the course of the following pages should be rendered useful, under the divine blessing, to candidates for holy orders, or any of his younger brethren in the ministry of the church, the object of their publication will have been fully attained.

Winchester House, St. James' Square,
May, 1835.

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THE

MINISTERIAL CHARACTER,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

The scope of Christ's prophetical Mission.

In considering the character of Christ, as "a teacher come from God,"[1] it will be always present to the mind of the believer, that the office of prophet was subordinate in the object of our blessed Lord's incarnation to the office of priest. His intention was, not alone to instruct by word and example, according to a popular and specious representation, which strikes at the very root of Christianity,[2] but to redeem;—not alone to pro-

[1] John iii. 2.

[2] "God appeared," said Abelard, "in flesh, for no other end than for our instruction by word and example; nor did he suffer and die for any other reason than to show and re-

mulgate the revelation of a future life,[3] but to "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."[4] However properly we may exalt the purity and spirituality of his doctrine—the sublimity of his discourses—the perfection of his moral precepts —we shall still be far from comprehending his real glory, while we contemplate him exclusively, or principally, as an "ensample of godly life,"[5] instead of a sacrifice; as a lawgiver instead of a redeemer. No error can be more dangerous than "the supposition, that man wanted an instructor, more than a saviour: or, in other words, that the merits of Christ were

commend his love towards us." *Milner's Church History*, vol. iii. p. 345. "This was not the sole or principal design for which he condescended to dwell on the earth, though it seems to be so considered by mere moralists and Socinians. The subject ought not, however, to be neglected; for it forms an important and essential part of the Christian system; and, if duly regarded, will carry us much farther than many of those, who chiefly insist upon it, may imagine or desire. O that we may so contemplate this model of all perfection, that, beholding in him, 'as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'" 2 Cor. iii. 18. *Robinson's Christian System*, Essay xxvi.

[3] Dr. Priestley considered "the principal article of our Saviour's mission" to be "the revelation of a future life." *Theol. Rep.* vol. iv. p. 436.

[4] Heb. ix. 26.

[5] Collect for second Sunday after Easter.

not so necessary to obtain remission of sins, as his instruction was to teach us the way of righteousness. But this is contrary to scripture."[6] Macknight has drawn the distinction with remarkable clearness. "The Son of God came from heaven, not to make the gospel revelation, but to be the subject of it, by doing and suffering all that was necessary to procure the salvation of mankind."[7] It must never be forgotten, therefore, that he who revealed eternal life as a prophet, also "gave" it as a king.[8]

Still such is the importance of this secondary object of our Lord's mission, that St. John, after proving his divinity, immediately proceeds to refer to his character as the prophet of mankind. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men . . . . . That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."[9] During the lapse of four thousand years truth had been corrupted in various ways; partly by philosophy, partly by tradition; partly by false, and partly by perverted views of what was excellent or holy; it was time for God to vindicate the knowledge of himself, and by creating light, as it were, a second time, to illuminate the

[6] *Life of Rev. T. Scott,* p. 98.

[7] *Macknight's Translation of the Epistles,* First Preliminary Essay, vol. i.

[8] John xvii. 2.

[9] John i. 4. 9.

moral creation, long covered by a darkness similar to that which, at the beginning, rested upon the face of the whole earth. Christ, therefore, claimed to be considered in the spiritual world, what the sun was in the natural, the source and centre of all light. "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."[1]

Others, it is true, before the advent of our Lord, had been commissioned, from time to time, to communicate the divine will to man; but Christ as much surpassed the most favoured among them by the extent of his discoveries, in his character as prophet, of the gracious purposes of his heavenly Father towards the fallen sons of Adam, as he exceeded all who had gone before him in his nature and dignity as God. He glorified himself as much in the display of his attribute of omniscience, as of omnipotence. The prophets were employed for particular purposes, with limited and special messages. Their errand was sometimes to specific nations, sometimes to specific individuals. Thus was Moses sent to the children of Israel, and Jonah to the Ninevites; thus Elijah to Ahab, and Nathan to David. But the mission of Christ was fettered by no restrictions of place or person. It was,

[1] John viii. 12; ix. 5.

in its ultimate extension at least, as irrespective of country and of people, as of time. As it was to have effect eventually upon the face of the whole creation, and to know neither end or limit, until all the kingdoms of the world acknowledge his empire, and all the dwellers upon earth become his people; so was the character of his revelation adapted to the universal wants of all mankind, and commensurate with the utmost necessities of the human race. For in him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[2] This, therefore, is one of the points on which Owen insists, for the purpose of proving Christ's ability to save to the uttermost them that come to God through him. "As a prophet, he did not receive this or that particular revelation from God; but all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were laid up in him, and he knew the whole mind and counsel of God, as coming forth from his divine bosom?"[3]

I. For a knowledge of the character which our Lord was intended to sustain in his prophetical office, we must have recourse, in the first instance, to holy writ. It was to this source that he himself, in the days of his flesh, referred the Jews for information. "Search the scriptures . . . . . they are they which testify of me."[4]

[2] Col. ii. 3. [3] On Heb. vii. 23–25.

[4] John v. 39.

Now the only direct prediction of the Messiah, under the name of the prophet, occurs in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken . . . . I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."[5]

But besides this distinct and explicit declaration, by which the Israelites were expressly taught to apply to the spiritual deliverer of their nation the title of prophet, the Jewish scriptures are not deficient in passages abundantly descriptive of the manner in which that prophet should discharge his functions.[6] There is also another important class of texts, having a metaphorical allusion to our Lord's prophetical office—where, for instance, he is spoken of as a messenger or apostle[7]—as a shepherd[8]—as a counsellor[9]—as a

[5] Deut. xviii. 15. 18, 19.

[6] Is. xi. 1, 2; xlii. 1—4. 6, 7; lxi. 1—3.

[7] Zech. ii. 9; Mal. iii. 1, compared with John v. 36; John xx. 21; Heb. iii. 1.

[8] Is. xl. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; xxxvii. 24, compared with John x. 14. 16; Heb. xiii. 20; 1 Pet. ii. 25.

[9] Is. ix. 6; Zech. vi. 13.

light[1]—as a witness[2]—or as a lawgiver.[3] On reference to these passages, it will be found to have been predicted of the scope of our Lord's prophetical mission, that he should be a messenger who would unreservedly reveal the whole will of God, and his laws for the government of men in general, as Moses did with regard to the more limited purpose and period for which God employed him—that this revelation would be complete, and consequently final, (for "last of all he sent his Son"[4])—and that, as for those who would not acknowledge his authority, or receive his Father's word from his mouth, God would require it at their hands.

II. The next step, therefore, is to inquire how far the conditions of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus.

1. We have, first, Christ's own testimony to the fulfilment, in his own person, of the predictions relating to the prophet who should come. On his first appearance in the synagogue of his own town Nazareth, he read the passage from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, wherein the prophet describes the appointment of the Messiah to preach the gospel; and then proceeded to

[1] Is. ix. 2; xlix. 6; lx. 1—3; Mal. iv. 2.
[2] Is. lv. 4, compared with Rev. i. 5.
[3] Is. xxxiii. 22. [4] Matt. xxi. xxxvii.

apply it to himself in the most explicit terms. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."[5] This occurrence took place at the beginning of his ministry, so that he was inducted into it, as it were, with a regular declaration of the authority under which he acted as a teacher, and of the nature of the commission which, in virtue of that authority, he was about to open. In the same year he appealed to the prophecy in Deuteronomy. "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me."[6] When he had nearly arrived at the end of his ministry, after speaking of himself as the light of the world and the shepherd of the flock, (two of those images under which, as has been seen, his own prophetical character had been represented many ages before,) he again urges the validity of his pretensions; and appeals, as an additional motive for belief, to the notoriety of his miracles, which had been wrought in the sight of the whole nation since he formerly claimed attention as a divine teacher.[7] After his resurrection he pursued the same system in his discourse with the two disciples going to Emmaus. Beginning at Moses, he went from the original promise in

[5] Luke iv. 16—21. [6] John v. 45, 46.
[7] John x. 24, 25.

Genesis to the prediction of the prophet in Deuteronomy, and then in order through all the prophets, expounding the things concerning himself.[8] From first to last, therefore, in the face of an unbelieving people, ready to gainsay, and reluctant to admit as fact what, if true, would condemn themselves, Christ openly maintained his pretensions to be the prophet like unto Moses—and of the multitudes interested in disproving the assertion, none durst dispute it.

2. We have John the Baptist's testimony to the same fact. "The voice" bare record to "the word."[9] After his disciples had complained to him of the success of Christ's ministry, he rejoices in witnessing this consummation of the glory which he had himself foretold. "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him,—this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled . . . . For he, whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."[1] Nor is the weight of this testimony invalidated by the apparent doubt conveyed in his message to Jesus—"Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"[2] The most satisfactory explanation of this difficulty appears to be that adopted by Mr. Benson, who follows

[8] Luke xxiv. 27. [9] John i. 23, compared with verse 1.
[1] John iii. 28—34. [2] Matt. xi. 3.

in his interpretation the view taken by the author of the Questions which stand among the works of Justin Martyr. It will be observed, that the evangelist expressly directs attention to the situation of John at the time the query was proposed. John had heard "in the prison" the works of Christ. In confinement, therefore, himself, he had no means of ascertaining personally the truth of the reports which reached him, respecting the life of a certain extraordinary personage said to have lately appeared in Judea. Had any works of a miraculous nature really been wrought? If so, had they been wrought by that very Jesus whom he had himself baptized, and whom he had heard acknowledged by a voice from heaven? To clear up these doubts, and to ascertain the identity of the person whose fame had given rise to them, he sent two of his disciples to make the necessary inquiries, and report accordingly. "They came, they saw, they heard, they believed, and then returned with the glad tidings of certainty to their master. And he also heard, and he also believed. His uncertainty was built upon just and reasonable grounds. It was the result of a want of confidence, either in those who bore witness to the miracles of Jesus, or in the identity of the person by whom they were performed. When that want of confidence was once removed, the effect

ceased with the cause, and he became thoroughly convinced. For scripture often speaks to us as positively by its silence, as its assertions; and in the future pages of the evangelist we meet with no other symptom whatever of the Baptist's doubt."[3]

3. Again, we have the testimony of the apostles and disciples; as in the conversation between Philip and Nathanael;[4] and in that of the two disciples going to Emmaus.[5] Peter testified in the name of all of them, "Thou art the Christ;" and the same record is borne by him again in his sermon at Jerusalem, where he directly applies to Christ the prophecy in Deuteronomy, quoted before.[6] St. Stephen refers to the same passage, and sets his seal with his dying lips to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.[7] And again, the apostle says to the Hebrews,—"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house."[8]

[3] *Hulsean Lectures for* 1820. Discourse iii.
[4] John i. 45. [5] Luke xxiv. 19.
[6] Mark viii. 29; Acts iii. 22, 23.
[7] Acts vii. 37. [8] Heb. iii. 1, 2.

4. Lastly, we have the testimony of the people—an evidence of unspeakable value, because it proceeded from unwilling witnesses, who stood convicted of wilful unbelief by the very admissions, which acknowledged the Messiah's prophetical character. "Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the prophet." And again, after the miracle at Nain, with an immediate reference to the prediction of Moses, "They glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us."[9] These admissions are so unqualified, that it would appear as if the convictions on which they were founded could not have yielded again to the persuasions of scepticism or prejudice. Were we to open the bible for the first time, and to read the decisive testimony borne in these passages to the prophetical character of our Lord, we should scarcely allow, that such a distinct recognition could proceed from the people who so soon cried out against the same individual, "Crucify him, crucify him." What! we should ask, with something of the same astonishment, which seems to have filled the mind of Pilate when he presided in judgment against him, Would they crucify their prophet?[1]

[9] John vii. 40; Luke vii. 16. See other instances, Matt. xxi. 11; John vi. 14.

[1] John xix. 6. 15.

This, however, is the certain, though humiliating conclusion to which scripture leads us. Christ "came unto his own, and his own received him not."[2] And it is among such instances of the contradictions and inconsistencies of human conduct, that we find the most painful, but at the same time the most undeniable internal evidences of our fallen nature, and the extent of its consequent estrangement from the knowledge and love of God.

That a whole generation of Jews should have remained insensible to the force of a series of predictions, successively delivered by prophets of their own religion and country,—preserved among their own records,—and implanted in their minds from childhood, as one of the points of their habitual belief—predictions, finally, which were all explicitly and satisfactorily fulfilled in the person of Jesus—is so extraordinary an instance of national delusion, that not even the previous course of disobedience which the whole of their history exhibits could have prepared us to expect it. It had been said of them by one who knew them well, in the bitterness of his disappointment, after forty years experience of their manners, "Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you;"[3]—and the fifteen centuries, which

[2] John i. 11. [3] Deut. ix. 24.

intervened between the time of Moses and their demand for the blood of Jesus in the hall of Pilate, proved that the reproach which the fathers had deserved continued to be applicable to the posterity of the latest generation. Our Lord upbraided the Jews with their unprofitable reception of the word of God, even though proceeding from the mouth of Moses. "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?"[4] Unhappily the taint of unbelief seems to remain hereditary and inveterate in the Israelitish character, even to the present day; and did we not know from scripture, that God, who has broken off the branches, is able to graff them in again, and that he who is faithful has held out to the church a promise of their ultimate salvation,[5] we might be led to conclude, that the measure of their iniquities was full, and that Jehovah had finally cast them away from his favour for ever.

Again, when we consider the number and clearness of the texts referring to this subject, it appears not a little remarkable, that there should have been no general expectation among the Jews, that our Lord would come in the character of a prophet and teacher. They waited for him

[4] John vii. 19.

[5] Rom. xi. 17—27. See also Ezek. xxxv. xxxvi. xxxvii. 25; Is. ii. 3; lxi. 9.

as a king,[6] as a conqueror,[7] as a deliverer from captivity,[8] as a judge,[9]—but not as the prophet like unto Moses.[1] They looked for some one to appear under that form previously to Christ's advent;[2] but there was no distinct understand-

[6] John vi. 14, 15. [7] Matt. xxi. 9.

[8] Luke xxiv. 21.

[9] Luke xii. 14, 15, compared with Joel iii. 12; Mic. iv. 3.

[1] Benson (*Life of Christ*, p. 283,) says, that both Jews and Samaritans expected the Messiah under the character of an extraordinary prophet, as well as of a great king; and in support of his opinion, quotes John iv. 25, 26. 29. 42; and vi. 14, 15; and xii. 13; Matt. xxi. 11; Luke xxiv. 19. 21. But it will be seen, on reference to the passages, that not one of these texts affords any foundation for the assertion. There is no doubt that the Jews expected a prophet; but it does not appear, from any thing in scripture, that they expected that prophet would be the Christ. On the contrary, the expected prophet and the Christ are specially distinguished from each other by the evangelist, in reference to the diversity of opinion respecting Jesus. "Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ." John vii. 40, 41. The same distinction is made in the questions put to John. "He confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? (ὁ προφήτης, the prophet.) And he answered, No." John i. 21. See also 25. The corrupt state of religion among the Jews at the time of our Saviour's advent, unquestionably formed one of the great obstacles to their reception of his mission. He told them plainly that he came to fulfil the law. "Think not," &c. Matt. v. 17.

[2] Matt. xvii. 10.

ing that he himself should sustain the prophetical office. The Samaritans, who admitted only the Pentateuch into the canon of their sacred books, and who consequently had only one prediction relating to our Lord under that character, yet had more correct notions of his commission, than those who had not only Moses, but the prophets, to enlighten them. "I know"—said the woman of that nation to Jesus—"that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things." And in her subsequent description of him to the men of her city, she styles him the man, which told her all things that ever she did; whence she inferred that he must be the Christ.[3]

Yet, although it was known unto God from the beginning, that his own people would afford an awful specimen of that hardness of heart, which accompanies apostasy from the truth, the scope of our Lord's personal ministrations was confined exclusively to the Jews. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[4] He began his public teaching in Nazareth, the place of his infancy. He confined it to the limited, though populous, district of Galilee, during nearly the whole period of his ministry. His apostles were expressly enjoined to proclaim the approach of the kingdom of heaven

[3] John iv. 25—29. [4] Matt. xv. 24.

among their countrymen only; and, lest their zeal for the salvation of others should surmount the persuasion, which they shared in common with the rest of their brethren, that the children of Abraham alone were heirs of the promise, the limits of their commission were strictly confined to the boundaries of Judea by a special order. "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."[5] St. Paul accordingly styles our Lord "a minister of the circumcision," and declares to the unbelieving Jews at Antioch, that "it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to them."[6]

In fulfilling the divine decrees on this subject, Christ was exposed to a trial of patience, which no one, merely human, can ever be called to undergo. Hope is one of the great moving principles, which give life and energy to our actions. Were we sure beforehand, that all our efforts to promote any object of our desire would be unavailing, that our words would be always listened to with indifference, or our actions always thwarted by some overruling prejudice, few would have sufficient steadiness of purpose to persevere long against the certainty of disappointment, and to maintain unavailing struggles in a cause foreseen

[5] Matt. x. 5.

[6] Rom. xv. 8; Acts xiii. 46.

from the beginning to be hopeless. Among many discouragements, which the ordinary labourers in the spiritual vineyard are destined to encounter, an occasional blessing from above on their industry is the charm which sweetens their task, and gives a fresh impulse to renewed exertions in the prosecution of their duty. Or, if the blessing be withholden for a time, still there is expectation—expectation brought before the throne of grace in prayer, and warranted by the promise, "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not."[7] But, so far from being sustained by witnessing the acceptableness of his ministry, our Lord was perfectly aware, before he entered on it, that as a prophet he should receive no honour in his own country. He knew the inveteracy, the extent, the insuperable enmity of the opposition he was to encounter; yet with all this foreknowledge of the universal rejection which awaited him by the people of his peculiar adoption, he announces to them the proffered terms of reconciliation with God, as if the whole that was to happen when his hour was come had never been revealed to his view. He foresaw that the good seed which he was scattering would not be immediately fruitful; and that, although others hereafter might reap the spiritual harvest on ground which he had first broken up, yet that

[7] Gal. vi. 9.

the generation to which he personally addressed himself would be stained with a crime, in comparison of which all that their fathers had committed was light in the balance. He foresaw that his blood would lie on them and on their children, as a kind of national curse imprecated by themselves on their own heads.[8] Yet he set his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, and laboured as patiently among them, as if they were destined to be his crown of rejoicing, and the blessed sons of his adoption. He offered to the last with unshaken faithfulness all the privileges of redemption, and bequeathed to them by his long suffering and gracious endurance the awful responsibility of a deliberate rejection of salvation.

At the same time, though our Saviour was statedly the prophet of the Jews, yet he gave occasional pledges to the Gentiles, of the mercy hereafter designed for them. Thus he declared his Messiahship to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and abode two days in her city, contrary to his apparent intention; so that "many more believed, because of his own word."[9] So too, when certain Greeks desired to see him, he delivered a very remarkable hint, that the time was now at hand, when all the ends of the world would be brought within the

[8] Matt. xxvii. 25. [9] John iv. 41.

pale of salvation.[1] Thus was witnessed in his ministry the partial fulfilment of the words of Jeremiah, "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest;" and of Isaiah, referred to by Christ himself, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."[2] And, however proper it may be to explain these texts in a secondary sense of the influence of divine grace upon the minds of men, through the motions of the Holy Spirit, yet our Lord's own quotation of the words, when representing himself as the bread of life, seems to make it necessary to refer them to him in the first instance.

III. Having thus examined the predicted character of Christ as a prophet, and the manner in which the conditions of that character were actually fulfilled in our Lord's person, it remains that the objects of his prophetical mission should be briefly considered.

The several revelations that have been vouchsafed to mankind, have been always adapted in a manner worthy of the divine wisdom to the particular wants of the times when they were delivered. Under the patriarchal dispensation the promise of one who should hereafter bruise the serpent's head, was necessary in order to support

[1] John xii. 20—23.

[2] Jer. xxxi. 34; Is. liv. 13, compared with John vi. 45.

man in his fallen state, and to save him from irrecoverable despair. With this view the promise of a future redeemer, which formed the subject of the first revelation, was from time to time confirmed and enlarged, to the unspeakable comfort of Abraham and his descendants. Under the Mosaic dispensation a knowledge of the one God was needful to preserve a nation surrounded by idolaters from polytheism; and a system of temporal rewards and punishments was wanted to supply the place of any distinct communication respecting a future state. Accordingly the Israelites were told, that the Lord their God was one Lord,[3] and a code of laws was enacted, to which they were required to pay implicit attention, on pain of penal inflictions, in case of disobedience.

But when Christ came to the Jews, he found them resting in a formal observance of the ritual law, and possessed with a belief of their federal title to exclusive salvation. Hence a principal object of his ministry, doctrinally considered, was the removal of these two errors. At the same time it was far from being his purpose to give a complete development of christian truth, during his personal ministry; and in particular one of the two doctrines just stated was only

[3] Deut. vi. 4; Mark xii. 29.

obscurely alluded to by himself, and was left to be more fully explained by the preachers who followed him. "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."[4] Agreeably to this design, the manner of his teaching was rather declarative than expository; rather an exhibition of general outlines, than a perfect and fully finished system. St. Mark's first description of it is very characteristic of his summary mode of preaching throughout the whole of his ministry,—"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching (κηρύσσων, proclaiming) the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."[5] "His lessons did not consist of disquisitions; of any thing like moral essays, or like sermons, or like set treatises upon the several points which he mentioned. When he delivered a precept, it was seldom that he added any proof or argument; still more seldom that he accompanied it with what all precepts require, limitations and distinctions. His instructions were conceived in short emphatic

[4] John xiv. 25, 26; xvi. 13. [5] Mark i. 14, 15.

sententious rules, in occasional reflections, or in round maxims."[6]

In fact, so much did our Saviour leave to be explained and supplied by the apostles, that infidel writers have taken occasion from thence to draw an argument unfavourable to the truth of christianity. And, as if to prove how secondary was his prophetical office in comparison of his priestly character, notwithstanding he was sent exclusively to the Jews, he preached little at Jerusalem, and seldom went thither, except when called to the celebration of the great feasts. He was more free in his communications in the single conversation with the Samaritan woman, than in all his discourses with his own countrymen during the whole of his ministry.

If, however, Christ did not come as a prophet to explain fully his own dispensation, much less did he come "into the world to condemn the world."[7] He was not yet invested with any judicial character; and therefore, when the scribes and Pharisees brought before him an offender for judgment, he declined interfering with functions which, by their own law, belonged to the civil magistrate.[8] He came rather to magnify the patience and long-suffering of God, in awakening sinners, and calling them to repentance, than to

[6] *Paley's Evidences,* ii. 49. [7] John iii. 17; xii. 47.
[8] John viii. 3—11.

anticipate the season of punishment by an immediate sentence, which, even had it been demanded from the purest motives, would have been contrary to the analogy of the divine judgments. There were many reasons which justified the wisdom of Providence in suffering the "tares to grow together with the wheat until the harvest."[9]

Neither was the foretelling of coming events an essential part of our Lord's prophetical mission. He foretold enough to demonstrate his knowledge of futurity, and the accomplishment of some of his predictions have already stamped his pretensions to the character of a prophet with the undeniable seal of truth.[1] But neither was the subject matter of his prophecies so paramount in importance, or their number so considerable, as to make it necessary that one should descend from heaven, much less the Son of God himself from the bosom of the Father, solely for the purpose of declaring the dispersion of the Jews, the destruction of their city, his own death and resurrection, the propagation and final triumph of the gospel. Prophecy was incidental to Christ's mission, not its end.

The special object to which the teaching of Christ was primarily directed—an object which

[9] Matt. xiii. 30.

[1] Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 22; xx. 17—19; xxiii. xxiv. xxv.

could have been attained only by him who was one with the Father[2]—was the declaration of the divine will conveyed through his medium. By him God "hath in these last days spoken unto us." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things that I have heard of him." "All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."[3]

It is observable, that on this ground alone did Christ himself condescend to account for his qualifications to be a public instructor. In reply to the astonishment expressed by the Jews at his teaching, which led them to ask, "How knoweth this man letters," (γράμματα, "learning," as it is rendered in the margin,) "having never learned?" he told them plainly, that his doctrine was not his own, but his who sent him.[4] He took upon himself openly and in his own person that character, which he had hitherto sustained through the medium of others. For, as in Melchisedec was represented his everlasting priesthood, so in the series of divine revelations communicated in different ages to holy men of God, was also indirectly displayed the everlast-

[2] John x. 30. [3] Heb. i. 2; John i. 18; viii. 26; xv. 15.
[4] John vii. 15, 16.

ing nature of his prophetical office. In all the appearances of Jehovah to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and the succeeding prophets, it was no other than Christ who was the declarer of the heavenly will, and through whom every manifestation of it was conveyed. "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify?"[5]

It is true, that the whole visible creation is a mighty monument of the divine power and wisdom; "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work;"[6] but of those things which constitute the surpassing excellence of his glory, the glory of his long-suffering in spite of provocations, the glory of his faithfulness to his promises, the glory of his mercy in the gracious scheme devised for the reconciliation of fallen man, the glory of his justice in the satisfaction made by a vicarious sacrifice for sin, the glory of his love in proffering not pardon only, but the blessings of an eternal kingdom to his redeemed inheritance,—of whatever, in short, is comprised under the term, "the great mystery of godliness,"[7]—the world

[5] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. [6] Ps. xix. 1. [7] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

would have remained in utter ignorance, unless the great high priest of the church had also condescended to become its prophet. The external fabric of the habitable earth, and the works of creation, wise and wonderful and glorious as they are, could never have adequately proclaimed the moral attributes of God. The world, even in its ruins, might bear ample testimony to the almighty power of its creator; but it would give no evidence of his unspeakable goodness. Man, though born in corruption, carries about him the marks of a being wonderfully and fearfully made, and stands forth as a memorial of the excellent knowledge of him who fashioned him behind and before, and laid his hand upon him. But for the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and mind of God, we must have recourse to the page of revelation; thick darkness covered them until they were made known by Christ; so that even in this accommodated sense of the words it may be truly said, "No man cometh to the Father but by him."[8] We might have known something of his greatness and majesty and power,—but should have had no clue to lead our souls to comprehend the height and depth of his goodness, or the extent of his love to man. We might have discovered, that it must have been an almighty wisdom which called our bodies into

[8] John xiv. 6.

life, and upheld by sovereign laws the organized world which is our earthly dwelling,—but we could not have arrived at the knowledge of the consoling truth, that the eternal happiness of his creatures was so dear to the creator, that he spared not his own Son in their behalf. Without the interference of our Lord, the sons of men would have been still, as we have seen them among the wisest and most civilized nations of antiquity, erecting an altar to the unknown God, alienated from spiritual religion, and vainly seeking for some vital principle of holiness which the light of nature is insufficient to supply. "To this end," said he to Pilate, "was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."[9]

Nothing less than that knowledge of the whole will of God which is implied in the attribute of omniscience, could have qualified the author of such a revelation for the due discharge of his office. Moses, the greatest of the prophets who preceded Christ, was not endowed with any perpetual gift of inspiration, authorizing him to speak at all times in the name of God, according to the necessity of the moment. He had no such comprehensive and indwelling knowledge of the universal will of Jehovah on every subject as would empower him to dispense with consulting

[9] John xviii. 37.

in the appointed way, and waiting for particular answers to the information required. He ascended indeed into the mount, but not into heaven. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."[1]

But "the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him"[2] (for so the apostle marks the peculiarity of the heavenly message announced through the ministry of our Saviour) was very different. As "in all things he was to have the pre-eminence,"[3] he came with such full powers, that, by reason of his intimate union with the Father, and perfect sympathy with his designs, God may be said to speak to us in him face to face. While he was a child, the evangelist bears him witness that he was "filled with wisdom;" and again, that he "increased in wisdom;" so that at the commencement of his ministry it was testified of him, that he was "full of the Holy Ghost."[4] Instead, therefore, of that radiance which once shone on the face of Moses, after his interview with the Most High; instead of those transient moments of inspiration, wherein in old time "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,"[5] as servants in the house[6] partially acquainted with tempo-

[1] John iii. 13. [2] Rev. i. 1. [3] Col. i. 18.
[4] Luke ii. 40. 52; iv. 1. [5] 2 Pet. i. 21. [6] Heb. iii. 5.

rary disclosures of their master's will; there was spread around the head of Christ a halo of perpetual illumination; so that the Spirit of God which lighted on him at his baptism, abode with him continually; and in him, as in an inexhaustible storehouse of truth, were "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[7] And thus it was foretold of him by Isaiah:[8] "The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the LORD." It was he who was "wonderful, counsellor," the "numberer of secrets," or the "wonderful numberer,"[9] who alone could reveal things hidden from angels and prophets of highest degree; and unfold the purposes designed from the beginning, the decrees foreordained in the bosom of the Father. He alone was "worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof."[1]

It would seem analogous to the order of the divine counsels, that as Christ, speaking by the prophets, was the original declarer of the will of God from the beginning, and as he afterwards became in his own person the direct medium of communication, he should not leave his work imperfect, but continue to sustain his office of

[7] Col. ii. 3.
[8] Is. xi. 2.
[9] Dan. viii. 13, marginal reading.
[1] Rev. v. 9.

teacher so long as the world stands in need of his heavenly aid.

The reasonableness of such an expectation is confirmed by the testimony of scripture. "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever." "Lo," said Jesus to his disciples, as his parting assurance, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;"[2] not only to the termination of their own natural lives, but with their successors in the christian church, through endless generations, in their studies and labours, whether public or private, for the extension of his spiritual kingdom. In the strength and comfort of this gracious assurance the ministers of his word may go forth to their work, in the full confidence that, though they be as it were "earthen vessels,"[3] he will be glorified in their weakness, and will perfect praise out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings. And this promise will be their sufficient support in the execution of their difficult office, wherever their lot may be cast—whether they are commissioned to bear the name of their

[2] Is. lix. 21; Matt. xxviii. 20. [3] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

master into lands which have not yet heard the joyful sounds of salvation; or among the Jews who have despised and rejected their prophet; or whether they are placed among christian nations, to stir them up to faithfulness, and to put them in remembrance of the duties of their calling. The Lord will be with them, and will "remember his word unto his servants,"[4] even unto the end of the world. "The fathers" of the church, "where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?"[5] or, as the Jews themselves observed, "Abraham is dead, and the prophets;" but the Lord "ever liveth" to complete his victory over satan, and to work by the servants, whom he employs ministerially to act in his name and under his authority,[6] for the diffusion of the glorious truths of his gospel.

The practical reflections suggested to the mind by this subject, are of very general application. There is no view of our Lord's character, which is not fraught with valuable instruction; and, like his own word, he may be alternately exhibited for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Hence we are called to "consider the apostle and high priest of our profession,"[7] not for the purpose of mere contemplation only, but of imitation. "Christ

[4] Ps. cxix. 49.
[5] Zech. i. 5.
[6] John viii. 52; Heb. vii. 25.
[7] Heb. iii. 1.

hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps." "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."[8] It is that his sheep may follow him, and especially those sheep who are themselves set over the rest of the flock as shepherds, that our Lord "goeth before them."[9] Yet it is important to remark, that this imitation does not so much consist in the performance of certain specific actions corresponding with the actions of Christ, (which in many cases is impossible,) as in an application of the principles of our Saviour's conduct to the various calls of christian duty; and in a general conformity of spirit and temper, according as our circumstances give occasion for its exercise, and as the experience of divine grace enables us to exhibit it. When our Lord said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you,"[1] he did not intend that his disciples should copy him literally in his action of washing their feet; but that they should look to the thing signified, and take him in the spirit which dictated the act for a model of humility and lowliness of mind. It is by this mode of imitation that the christian may study to attain the same "mind which was also in Christ Jesus," and

[8] 1 Pet. ii. 21. 1 John ii. 6.

[9] John x. 3, 4. [1] John xiii. 15.

daily endeavour to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life.[2]

1. Considering Christ as a messenger sent from God, we may be said, in the person of the messenger, to see in some measure the very lineaments and moral representation of the almighty power from whom he came. By his incarnation the nature of divinity itself stands revealed to our view; and though no man hath seen the Father at any time, yet, through the medium of the Son, as just an idea is formed of the unapproachable Godhead as the understanding of man can receive. We have Christ's own word for this truth; "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." And the apostle calls him "the express image of the person" of God. And again; we have "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[3]

We must collect then from the messenger, and from the tone of his message, the intentions of the Creator towards his creature. Is the messenger the "Prince of peace?" Then may we learn that "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" "for he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in

[2] Phil. ii 5. Collect for second Sunday after Easter. See *Miller's Bampton Lectures,* Lect. vi. p. 161, note i.

[3] John xiv. 9; Heb. i. 3; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

his flesh the enmity."[4] Is the message "on earth peace, good will towards men?" Then may we know of a certainty "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation;" and that "it pleased the Father . . . . . having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself?"[5] The analogy is the same here, as in the conduct of human affairs. An ambassador, invested with authority to transact the business of his principal, carries with him in his whole behaviour a deportment agreeable to the instructions of his superior; he speaks in the language, and adopts the general character of the power, whom he is commissioned to represent. We collect without difficulty from the pacific or warlike tone of his demeanour, whether the intentions of the party for whom he appears are conceived in a friendly or a hostile spirit.

Just such an ambassador is Christ between heaven and earth. God gives an earnest of the manner in which he regards mankind, from the character of him whom he sent from his bosom to propose terms of reconciliation to them. It is as the bow in the cloud; a gracious token of

[4] Is. ix. 6; Rom. v. 1; Eph. ii. 14, 15.

[5] Luke ii. 14; 2 Cor. v. 19; Col. i. 19, 20.

the mercy and love of a forgiving Father towards his erring children. Under the old dispensation he appeared to the world as a jealous God,—unapproachable by mortal presence,—shrouded in the semblance of a burning fire, and encompassed with the terrors of the storm and whirlwind,—whom none could see or hear, and live. But seen through the medium of Jesus, God is contemplated under a new character. He is no longer an avenging judge, exacting from man the penalties of the law, and demanding satisfaction for his offended justice; but a Saviour,[6] reconciled by an expiatory sacrifice of his own appointment, looking complacently on the renewed nature of his once lost children, and sending them through his Son a message of pardon and love. Former revelations had unfolded much of the majesty and grandeur and awfulness of God; but the declaration made of him by Christ is one, which, while it detracts nothing from his sublimity and power, invests him at the same time with the gentler attributes of tenderness and mercy. Through the apostle, who has now again "passed into the heavens . . . . touched with the feeling of our infirmities,"[7] after discharging his appointed ministry, the characteristics of divinity assume a new aspect; we see expressed in every trait of our Lord's human nature com-

[6] Luke i. 47; Tit iii. 4. [7] Heb. iv. 14, 15.

passion, and long-suffering, and love unspeakable; and we transfer in our reflections all these endearing qualities to God, of whom Christ is pronounced to be "the image."[8] Instead of the rod and the sword of his wrath, the cross is lifted up in token of redemption and salvation. Instead of a sentence of universal punishment, (inasmuch as "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,"[9] instead of that terrible reckoning for sin which awaited every inmate of a fallen world, we hear the Almighty speaking once again in accents of mercy to his creatures—we receive from his lips an assurance of grace and favour and remission of sins,—and we look forward with confidence to the gracious pledge, that "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," will "with him also freely give us all things."[1]

It was the custom of Jesus frequently to remind his hearers that he came in this character of an ambassador, and that his speech was but the message of him from whom he came. "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." "As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." "He that sent me is true; and I speak to the

[8] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [9] Rom. iii. 23.

[1] Rom. viii. 32.

world those things which I have heard of him."[2] As Christ refers to his Father, so must the preacher refer to Christ, as his authority. He must glory in the privilege of being his ambassador in bonds. He must speak to his people nothing but what he has learnt in his master's word. He must not add a supplement of his own to the Lord's volume; or suppress, out of pride, or dislike, or fear, any of the chapters of the book of life. He must not dare to "go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of his own mind; but what the Lord saith, that shall he speak."[3] In the exercise of the ministry of reconciliation which has been committed to him, he must approach his people in the spirit, and with the language, of the apostle to his Corinthian brethren—"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."[4]

2. We are especially called upon to attend to the contrast between the ministerial character of our Saviour, and that of all other teachers. This is one of the most profitable views in which we may "look unto Jesus" for a pattern, as well as for saving life; and become "followers" of

[2] John iii. 34; vii. 16; viii. 26. 28. See also vi. 38; xiv. 10. 24; xvii. 8. 14.

[3] Numb. xxiv. 13.

[4] 2 Cor. v. 20.

his example, as well as dependent on him as "the author and finisher of our faith."[5]

If we consider the Jewish teachers, we shall find them represented in the holy scriptures either as dumb dogs, or blind guides—either as slumbering on their posts, and betraying their charge through indolence, or corrupting the word of God committed to them, and making it void through their traditions—either as teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, or occupied in a vain and laborious trifling, which tended to withdraw the mind from any spiritual religion.[6] The remarkable contrast between the teaching of the scribes and that of our Lord, is very forcibly intimated by the frequency with which the evangelists bring them into comparison.[7] Or if we look into the heathen nations, we shall find, as might be expected, among the best of the philosophers of the pagan world, the temper and spirit of their religion but too faithfully pourtrayed in the character of its teachers. And even when we turn away from these corrupt sources of knowledge, and revert to the disciples of christianity for examples of good and faithful servants in the office of teacher, there

[5] 1 Cor. xi. 1; with Heb. xii. 2.

[6] Is. xxix. 10; lvi. 10; Matt. xv. 6. 9; xxiii. 16; Mark vii. 4.

[7] Matt. vii. 28, 29; Mark i. 22; John vii. 46.

will be too often reason to lament their sad departure from the perfect model exhibited by him from whom they derive their authority. There was something reprehensible found in five out of the seven ministers addressed by the Spirit in the apocalypse.[8] There was in Peter himself something to be blamed, even in the judgment of Paul;[9]—and so sharp a contention arose between Paul and Barnabas, that they were obliged to renounce the comfort of mutual co-operation, and departed to labour separately in different parts of the same vineyard.[1] Cecil has well said, "that God, by leaving his greatest servants to the natural operation of human frailty in some part or other of their character, has written on the face of the christian church, 'Cease ye from man.' He does by perfection in character, as he did by the body of Moses,—he hides it, that it may not be idolized."[2]

At the same time the providence of God has so ordered it, that since the original appointment of an order of men set apart for the work of the ministry, there have never been wanting among them bright examples of zeal and diligence, which have shone like lights in the visible church. An examination of the characters of the several apostles, would show in a very instructive man-

[8] Rev. ii. iii.
[9] Gal. ii. 11.
[1] Acts xv. 39.
[2] *Remains*, p 251.

ner how divine grace can call into action the different tempers and abilities of men of every cast. The indolence of Mark, the violence of Peter, and the fiery zeal of Paul, were all overruled by the penetrating influence of that renewing Spirit, which, when received into the heart, is able to leaven the whole lump. The history of every age since the first promulgation of christianity will afford similar examples. Justin, in the second century, exhibits an instance of the consecration of learning to the service of God; Valentinian, in the fourth, of a violent temper, in a great degree subdued by religious principle; and the change in the character of Jerome strikingly displays the effect of divine grace on a disposition naturally intractable and rugged.

But these are instances of christian teachers who have been remarkable for the successful cultivation of some single virtue. If we advance a step farther, and look for such an assemblage of heavenly dispositions combined in one individual, as Chrysostom, for instance, has enumerated in his requisites for a pastor,[3] it will be seen how

[3] The passage is a remarkable one, and deserves to be quoted at length. Ἐννόησον οὖν ὁποῖόν τινα εἶναι χρὴ τὸν πρὸς τοιοῦτον μέλλοντα ἀνθέξειν χειμῶνα, καὶ τοσαῦτα κωλύματα τῶν κοινῇ συμφερόντων διαθήσειν καλῶς. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ ἄτυφον, καὶ φοβερὸν καὶ προσηνῆ, καὶ ἀρχικὸν καὶ κοινωνικὸν, καὶ ἀδέκαστον καὶ θεραπευτικὸν, καὶ ταπεινὸν

rarely any measure of such a display occurs in one, who is not exempt from human infirmities.

καὶ ἀδούλωτον, καὶ σφοδρὸν καὶ ἥμερον εἶναι δεῖ· ἵνα πρὸς ἅπαντα ταῦτα εὐκόλως μάχεσθαι δύνηται, καὶ τὸν ἐπιτήδειον μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς ἐξουσίας, κἂν ἅπαντες ἀντιπίπτωσι, παράγειν, καὶ τὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον μετὰ τῆς αὐτῆς ἐξουσίας, κἂν ἅπαντες συμπνέωσι, μὴ προσίεσθαι, ἀλλ' εἰς ἓν μόνον ὁρᾷν τὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας οἰκοδομήν· καὶ μηδὲν πρὸς ἀπέχθειαν ἢ χάριν ποιεῖν. —*Chrysost. de Sacerdot.* Lib. III. Ch. xvi. I cannot refrain from placing by the side of this passage, part of the beautiful portrait of "The Christian Pastor," drawn by the master hand of Bishop Ken.

Give me the priest these graces shall possess—
Of an ambassador the just address:
A father's tenderness, a shepherd's care,
A leader's courage, which the cross can bear;
A ruler's awe, a watchman's wakeful eye,
A pilot's skill, the helm in storms to ply;
A fisher's patience, and a labourer's toil,
A guide's dexterity to disembroil;
A prophet's inspiration from above,
A teacher's knowledge, and a Saviour's love.
Give me the priest, a light upon a hill,
Whose rays his whole circumference can fill;
In God's own word and sacred learning vers'd,
Deep in the study of the heart immers'd;
Who in sick souls can the disease descry,
And wisely for restoratives apply;
To beatific pastures leads his sheep,
Watchful from hellish wolves his fold to keep;
Who seeks not a convenience, but a cure,
Would rather souls than his own gain ensure.

The union of many virtues in one heart is a sight so lovely, that angels might desire to look upon it; but the union of contradictory excellencies, wherever found, and in whatever degree, cannot fail to form an extraordinary character. It has too often happened that, as Hooker said, "zeal hath drowned charity, and skill meekness." Milner remarks of Cyprian, that to unite such seemingly opposite things as discretion and fortitude, each in a very high degree, is a sure characteristic of greatness in a christian. He calls it grace in its highest exercise.[4] For as Mr. Bowdler[5] has beautifully, as well as truly observed, "a principle of compensation runs through the works of God. In the physical and intellectual world this is observable; and so also in morals: the

* * * * * *

Distrustful of himself in God confides,
Daily himself among his flock divides;
Of virtue uniform, and cheerful air,
Fix'd meditation, and incessant prayer;
Affections mortified, well-guided zeal,
Of saving truth the relish wont to feel.

* * * * * *

From wilful sin, though not from frailty, free;
Who still keeps Jesus in his heart and head,
Who strives in steps of our arch-priest to tread;
Who can himself and all the world deny,
Lives pilgrim here, but denizen on high.

[4] *Church Hist.* i. 338. [5] *Select Pieces*, p. 337.

stronger virtues are seldom found without an alloy of austerity, and the softer are nearly allied to weakness. It is plain that compensation implies defect, and we therefore reasonably might suppose that in the character of Christ the rule should be no longer verified. And thus we find it. His force was without harshness, his tenderness free from imbecility. Nor is this all. Not only were his virtues unaccompanied with their kindred failings, but the most opposite excellencies were found in him in equal perfection." He alone could at once instruct with meekness, and teach with such authority as to inspire even his bitterest opponents with reverential awe.[6] He could unite humility with greatness, dignity with self-abasement.[7] In him no inconsistency of practice neutralized the consistency of his doctrine.[8] The one was as perfect as the other was pure. It was this harmonious combination of features which formed the glory of his character—a combination of which we shall in vain search for parallels among other teachers.

[6] Compare Matt. vii. 29, with xi. 29.

[7] See some just remarks on this subject by Bishop Law, in his *Reflections on the Life and Character of Christ.* See also *Alexander's Outline of the Evidences of Christianity,* chap. viii. and a passage quoted by him from a discourse of Dr. Channing.

[8] John vii. 46, compared with viii. 46.

3. If Christ condescended to teach, that he might give his own sanction and authority to the dispensation, how humbly should it be received,—how implicitly venerated,—how dutifully obeyed! "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"[9]

On the part of the Jews, ignorance of their natural blindness and unconsciousness of their want of a spiritual teacher, were the principal causes, which led to their rejection of our Lord's prophetical office. It is our duty to watch against the prevalence of a similar spirit. The avenues of the heart must be kept open to conviction, that the entrance of the good seed, as it falls from the hand of the sower, be not obstructed, or its effect neutralized, by a mixture of earthly passions which corrupt, or of cares which choke

[9] Heb. ii. 1—3; x. 28, 29.

it. Above all, there must be much prayer for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and invigorate the understanding, and to overcome that dulness which cleaves inseparably to man, when left to the poverty and weakness of his own unassisted nature. And it has been always mercifully provided, that wherever there exists that fervent desire to learn in Christ's school, which wrought so powerfully in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch, some Philip has never been wanting to guide the inquiring spirit, and to improve the day of small things into a season of abundant light and grace. Much of course will depend on the choice of our objects of study, and on our manner of studying them.[1] Some are satisfied with any thing which exercises the intellectual powers; and some allow the empty and undigested ideas to pass over the mind, like objects over a mirror, without leaving on its surface any trace or permanent impression.

[1] Isaac Walton mentions the following anecdote of Bishop Sanderson, in his life of that prelate. "This minister asked the Bishop what books he studied most, when he laid the foundation of his great and clear learning. To which his answer was, that he declined reading many: but what he did read were well chosen, and read so often that he became very familiar with them." See on this subject an excellent chapter in *The Christian Ministry, by the Rev. C. Bridges,* on Habits of General Study.

This is to spend time, but not to improve it. The mind must be exercised in thinking, as well as in receiving notions. "Wisdom towards God," said Matthew Henry, "is to be gotten out of God's book; and that by digging. Most people do but walk over the surface of it, and pick up, here and there, a flower. Few dig into it; they are too lazy."[2] It was thus that the eunuch was reading the scriptures, when Philip was directed to join himself to his chariot.[3] It was for "searching" the same scriptures "daily," and comparing them with the preaching of the apostles, that the Bereans were distinguished by the title of "noble."[4] The heart of Lydia was opened while hearing the words of eternal life, so that she "attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."[5] We are thus indirectly guided to the proper end of study, and to the mode by which that study may be rendered profitable to us. And God, assuredly, will not withhold his blessing from those who are searching for the truth in the book of Christ, and are pondering in their hearts all the knowledge they acquire, with a view to a progressive growth in heavenly wisdom.

On the other hand the apostle cautions in the

[2] *Williams's Life of Matthew Henry*, p. 222.

[3] Acts. viii. 28, 29. [4] Acts xvii. 11.

[5] Acts xvi. 14.

most solemn terms against the danger of neglecting the words of the prophet of our dispensation. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."[6]

If this be true, when addressed to the general community of christians, with what awful force does the admonition apply to those who watch over the souls of their fellow-men as they who must give account! The scriptures contain two classes of directions, which may be considered as referring more particularly to those who are entrusted with ministerial functions. The first class includes all that relate to the discharge of the fundamental duty of their office, the message they have to deliver, and the faithful and right division of the word; while all such as are of secondary importance—the manner of communicating instruction and reproof, prudential admonitions calculated to rectify the judgment, the discretion requisite for the due management of a delicate mission—may be properly referred to the second class. With these passages of scripture for a daily manual, with our Lord's own example as a commentary upon them, and with his blessing upon their study

[6] Heb. xii. 25.

and application, it may be reasonably expected that the members of the priesthood "may wax riper and stronger in their ministry; and that they may so endeavour themselves, from time to time, to sanctify the lives of them and theirs, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that they may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow."[7]

[7] Ordination Service.

CHAPTER II.

The Preparation of Christ for his Ministry.

It is probable that such of the Jews as, like Simeon, were looking for their predicted Shiloh, and waiting, in patient belief of the promises, for the consolation of Israel, anticipated that our Lord's entrance upon his ministry would be simultaneous with his advent into the world. They would not unnaturally expect him to commence his task at once in the fulness of his Father's strength, without going through any previous course of preparation necessary for one designated in the usual manner to the service of the altar. From his character and pretensions they would look for an immediate and authoritative assumption of the sacerdotal functions, independent of external ordinances, and preceded by none of those preliminary exercises which would be required from the intended member of some ordinary priesthood. If he were found in the temple, sitting in the midst of

the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions, as one of their disciples, they would share in the amazement of his parents as at an occurrence contrary to all expectation, and beyond their understanding.[1] If they saw him coming to John to be baptized, their first thoughts would be those of the Baptist himself—"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"[2]

But what are the facts of the case, as we find them related by the evangelists? Few as are the incidents of our Lord's early years which the gospels record, they testify to a continued system of preparation, and to a course of life adapted to fit him, independently of his divine commission, for the exercise of a ministry so peculiar, and fraught with such extraordinary difficulties. Though his functions as a teacher were to cease at so early a period, yet he did not anticipate the customary season for their commencement according to the regulations of the Levitical priesthood. He was brought up in privacy, and subject to the will of his parents, and continued dwelling in retirement till his thirtieth year. He was prepared for undertaking his public duties by baptism—by fastings and watchings—by exposure to the temptations of Satan—by attendance on John's ministry. He entered upon them in obedience to a divine

[1] Luke ii. 46—48. [2] Matt. iii. 14.

call.[3] He took no step, except under the guidance of the Spirit. As he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, so, the conflict being ended, he returned in the power of the same Spirit into Galilee.[4] Even after he had been anointed to the preacher's office there was a certain degree of method observed in the way in which his first appearances took place. He commenced gradually. He preached and baptized first in Judea,[5] but his regular ministry did not begin until he came into Galilee. "From that time forth Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[6] In that country he made one of his most unlimited displays of almighty power, "healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people;[7] and thus paved the way, by the many miracles which he wrought there, for the more ready acceptance of the truths contained in the sermon on the mount, which he delivered immediately afterwards to the multitudes whom the fame of his works attracted to follow him.

Such were the measured advances by which the "word" and "wisdom" of God, which

[3] Matt. iii. 16, 17; xvii. 5; John vii. 16; viii. 42; xii. 28—30.

[4] Luke iv. 1—14.

[5] John iv. 1—3.

[6] Matt. iv. 17.

[7] Matt iv. 23.

"teacheth to profit,"[8] proceeded to his work of instruction. His way was made straight before him, his scrip provided, and his loins girded for the enterprize, as if in illustration of the precept of the wise man—"Prepare thy work without . . . . . and afterwards build."[9]

The preparation of John for his ministry is not less clearly discernible than that of our Lord; and in many respects was analogous to it. The particulars stated are sufficient to show "what manner of child" he was, even from his cradle;[1] and how carefully it pleased God to provide that the instrument which he had raised up should be fitted for the work he was designed to perform. As a descendant of Aaron, he was born in the legitimate line of the priesthood, and therefore no exceptions could be taken against his assumption of the ministerial office. As the son of parents who were "both righteous before God,"[2] honour was put upon his origin in the estimation of men, and security given for the observance of all those special directions for his education with which his birth was accompanied. It was not requisite for the character he was to sustain that he should be distinguished according to the measure of human greatness; but, as the Lord's messenger, it was

[8] Isa. xlviii. 17.
[1] Luke i. 66.
[9] Prov. xxiv. 27.
[2] Luke i. 6.

essential that some token should be given of his enjoyment of the divine favour, and of his acceptance with his own master. Accordingly, the promise was assured—"he shall be great in the sight of the Lord."[3] Created with a view to a particular mission, we might expect to find every period of his life marked with some reference to the object for which his existence was given. And so we observe him not even in infancy a common infant, but "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."[4] When notice is taken of his advance towards manhood, we are again reminded of the purpose to which his being was consecrated. "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit."[5] That expectation might be directed to his preaching, it was foretold of him, previously to his very birth, that he should "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God."[6] As one whose vocation called him to endure hardship, he was to "drink neither wine nor strong drink."[7] As one who was to dwell in deserts, and to cry as a voice in the wilderness, his food was to be such as might be procured any where—"locusts and wild honey;" his dress of the simplest and least self-indulgent

[3] Luke i. 15.
[4] Luke i. 15.
[5] Luke i. 80.
[6] Luke i. 16.
[7] Luke i. 15.

kind—"camel's hair, and a girdle of a skin about his loins."[8]

It is impossible to mistake the object of injunctions so remarkable and so particular, in matters at first sight of apparently little moment. In their very minuteness we detect their significancy. They intimate the necessity of a course of self-denial, and of a deadness to the pleasures of sense, which would render the child who was to be called "the prophet of the highest,"[9] superior to the ordinary wants of men. In subserviency to the same end he was in the deserts "until the day of his shewing unto Israel;"[1] subject during a retirement of thirty years to all the privations of the wilderness, cut off from social and spiritual intercourse, and without personal knowledge of him whose forerunner he was to be, until Jesus came to him for baptism. Bishop Horne concludes from the circumstances of this seclusion "that the solitary way of life is necessary to qualify ministers of the gospel for the offices of the social; or that he who would serve God acceptably in public, must first prepare himself for that purpose in private." He accounts it "one of the no small advantages which St. John enjoyed by his retreat into the wilderness, that he was thereby delivered from

[8] Mark i. 6. [9] Luke i. 76.

[1] Luke i. 80.

the vain janglings of the many religious sects and fashions at that time in Judea."[2]

The call of the first ministers of Christ was of so peculiar a nature as not only to supersede, in a great measure, the need of preparatory discipline, but even to render such discipline in some respects unsuitable for the special circumstances of the case. It was part of the divine plan that the gospel should be promulgated, in the first instance, by rude and unlearned men, whose original habits of life were foreign to the work in which they were employed. It was essential that the strength of God should be manifested in the weakness of the instrument, and that their speech and preaching should not be "with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."[3]

Yet the attentive reader may remark many things in the narratives of the evangelists which were doubtless ordered with the view of fitting the disciples for their ultimate mission. All the twelve were natives of Galilee; and therefore had frequent opportunities of hearing the fame of him who "dwelt in Nazareth,"[4] before they joined him. All had been some time disciples before they became apostles. Two, at least, were disciples of John; and four others "believers in

[2] *Considerations on the Life and Death of John the Baptist.*
[3] 1 Cor. ii. 4. [4] Matt. ii. 23.

his divine legation, before they could have acquired either of these relations to Jesus Christ."[5] Thus, they were first the hearers of Christ; then gathered into the fellowship of attendance, before their ordination as apostles; that "from the beginning" they might be "eyewitnesses; having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first."[6] St. Mark especially notes this as one of the objects of their ordination—"He ordained twelve, that they should be with him."[7] During the time of this personal attendance they may be considered as passing through their probationary stage; and, in the course of it, the defection of one of their number occurred in the apostasy of Judas. When his place was to be supplied, the same qualification which was found in the objects of our Lord's own selection determined the eligibility of his successor; so that the two, between whom the lot decided, were chosen by the disciples from among those men who had "companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from them."[8] Agreeable to this pre-

[5] See *Greswell's Harmony of the Gospels*—a work of great interest as well as of research and learning. Diss. viii. part ii. vol. ii. p. 261. Diss. xi. vol. ii. p. 370. 372.

[6] Luke i. 2, 3.

[7] Mark iii. 14.

[8] Acts i. 21, 22.

paration and sifting of hearts is the apostolical injunction respecting those who were to be admitted deacons—"Let these first be proved."[9] And so Christ questioned his disciples closely as to their thoughts concerning himself—"Whom say ye that I am?"[1]

The inferences which arise from this view, though obvious, are too important to be dismissed entirely without notice.

1. It is clear that the steward of Christ's mysteries, to be an able minister of the new testament, must be "taught of God."[2] But it is no less clear, that he must not neglect to avail himself of all attainable means of preparation for his holy office. As much as lieth in him, he must apply himself wholly to this one thing, and draw all his cares and studies this way. It was sound advice from a christian pastor and father, when he wrote to his son whose views were directed to the ministry—"From the day that a youth, on christian principles, is devoted to the ministry, he ought to become a divinity student, and all his studies should bend to the one grand object."[3]

[9] 1 Tim. iii. 10.

[1] Matt. xvi. 15.

[2] John vi. 45. "Qui cupit juxta Paulum esse διδακτικὸς, hoc est, ad tradendam Dei doctrinam idoneus, det operam, ut prius sit θεοδιδακτὸς, id est, divinitus doctus."—*Erasmi Ecclesiastes.* edit. Lond. 1730, p. 15.

[3] *Life of Rev. Legh Richmond*, p. 579.

So thought, and so acted the fathers of the primitive church, whose dread of the responsibility of the ministerial charge was such, that they fled from orders, as from a snare for their souls, considering that the pastoral care was a work more suited to angels than to mortal man.

So also thought and acted the fathers of our own church—men whose lives shew that they had drunk deep of the spirit of christianity, and were profoundly touched with a sense of the importance of the truths they were called to promulgate. What is related of Dr. Donne is nothing more than the history of the holy diffidence with which the sacred office was approached in general by those devoted men, who seem to have thought the labour of their whole lives too small a preparation for its vast importance. "The king descended to a persuasion, almost to a solicitation of him to enter into sacred orders; which, though he then denied not, yet he deferred it for almost three years, all which time he applied himself to an incessant study of textual divinity, and to the attainment of a greater perfection in the learned languages, Greek and Hebrew."[4] Contrast with this the affecting remonstrance of a bishop of our church, whose language must often painfully recur to the mind of those on whom rests the

[4] *Walton's Life of Dr. John Donne.*

heavy responsibility of imposition of hands. "As such a method as I have proposed would probably strike some with a due awe of divine matters, so as to keep them at a distance till they were in some sort prepared for them; so it would oblige such as come to it, to bring along with them a serious temper of mind, and such a preparation of soul, as might make that their orders should be a blessing to them, as well as that they themselves should be a blessing to the church. It must be the greatest joy of a bishop's life, who truly minds his duty in this weighty task of sending out labourers into God's vineyard, to ordain such persons of whom he has just grounds to hope that they shall do their duty faithfully in reaping that harvest. He reckons these as his children indeed, who are to be his strength and support—his fellow-labourers and helpers—his crown and his glory. But, on the other hand, how heavy a part of his office must it be to ordain those against whom perhaps there lies no just objection, so that, according to the constitution and rules of the church, he cannot deny them; and yet he sees nothing in them that gives him courage or cheerfulness. They do not seem to have that love to God, that zeal for Christ, that tenderness for souls, that meekness and humility, that mortification and deadness to the world, that becomes the character and

profession which they undertake; so that his heart fails him, and his hands tremble when he goes to ordain them."[5] Baxter complains to the same effect. "Alas, it is the common danger and calamity of the church to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers before they are christians,

[5] *Burnet's Pastoral Care,* chap. vi. Erasmus has a spirited passage to the same purpose—"Quam igitur sunt præpostera mortalium judicia, qui quoslibet admittunt ad munus angelicum verius quam humanum; homines nec domitis affectibus, nec puros a vitiis, nec instructos literis, nec afflatos Spiritu, nec fide stabiles, nec charitate ferventes; non addam, nec sobrios, nec sani cerebri. Satis est habere vestem cineraceam; pullum aut candidum pallium. Atqui non statim ad militiam ascribitur, qui gestat galeam aut loricam; nec protinus clavo admovetur, qui vestem habet nauticam; nec domum extruendam committimus ei quisquis habet serram aut securim; sed diligenter inquirimus, qualis sit artifex, et quæ sint illius opera. Nunc in suggestum, hoc est, in cathedram plusquam regiam, insiliunt nulla institutione ad hoc munus præparati; qui perfricta fronte volvant linguam, intendant vocem, detonantes quicquid in buccam venerit, aut quicquid eis præscriptum sit ab indoctis, aut quicquid humanus dictaverit affectus." And again, in a similar strain; "Verum ad conciones sacras admittuntur, interdum etiam assiliunt, adolescentes, leves, indocti; quasi nihil sit facilius, quam apud populum exponere divinam scripturam, et abunde sufficiat perfricuisse faciem, et absterso pudore linguam volvere. Hoc malum ex eo fonte manat, quod non perpenditur quid sit ecclesiastici concionatoris tum dignitas, tum difficultas, tum utilitas."—*Ecclesiastes.*

who are sanctified by dedication to the altar as the priests of God before they are sanctified by hearty dedication as the disciples of Christ."[6] Flavel's views of the sacred office should be well considered by every aspirant to it—"I may say to him that snatches at the ministry, as Henry IV. did to his son that hastily snatched at the crown, 'He little knows what a heap of cares and toils he snatcheth at.' The labours of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones, hasten old age and death."[7]

2. The seclusion of our Lord, as well as of the Baptist, for so large a portion of their lives, before they entered upon the active employments of their ministries, recommends to the candidate for the pastoral office the duty of previous retirement.[8] "How many graces," says Quesnel, "how many lights, were for thirty years concealed in the deserts, while the darkness of

[6] *Reformed Pastor*, chap. i. sect. 1.

[7] *Life of Rev. J. Flavel.*

[8] St. Paul seems to have passed three whole years in retirement in Arabia after his conversion, before he exercised the apostolical ministry. He alludes to this journey, Gal. i. 17, 18. "Macknight's opinion is highly probable, that St. Paul's journey to Arabia immediately subsequent to his conversion (of which no mention is made in the inspired record of his ministerial travels) was not to exercise his ministry, but 'to receive further revelations.' Secret prayer and meditation

ignorance and vice increased on the earth!"[9] In retirement the future minister will make proof of his armour; and when, like John, he has "grown" by feeding on the bread of life and prayer, and "waxed strong" under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he will come forth obedient to his Lord's call at the time for his "shewing," and enter into that portion of the vineyard where an open door is set before him, bringing with him those fruits of study and meditation which God's grace has enabled him to lay up in store. "How great is the difference," remarks the same pious commentator, "betwixt a preacher formed gradually by the hand of God in retirement, fasting, and prayer, and those ordained in haste, who have no other school but the world, no other masters besides themselves, and no other preparation than human studies, interrupted by worldly conversations, diversions, play, good cheer, &c."[1]

Bishop Burnet instances the example of Gregory of Nazianzum to the same effect. "He had indeed submitted to his father's authority,

were doubtless the channels of divine revelation to his soul: while the more accurate and undisturbed study of his own heart, combined with prospective calculations of the fearful cost before him, probably occupied most profitably the interval of comparative privacy."—*Bridges' Christian Ministry*, part iii. chap. vi. See also *Wells, Script. Geogr.* vol. iii. p. 375.

[9] On Luke i. 80.

[1] On Luke iii. 2.

he being his bishop as well as his father. But immediately after he was ordained, he gives this account of himself in his apologetical oration: 'That he, judging he had not that sublimity of virtue, nor that familiar acquaintance with divine matters which became pastors and teachers; he therefore intending to purify his own soul to higher degrees of virtue, to an exaltation above sensible objects, above his body, and above the world, that so he might bring his mind to a recollected and divine state, and fit his soul, that as a polished mirror it might carry on it the impressions of divine ideas, unmixed with the alloy of earthly objects, and might be still casting a brightness upon all his thoughts, did, in order to the raising himself to that, retire to the wilderness.'"[2]

Nor is christian retirement less essential for the minister himself, than for the aspirant to the ministry. His Lord's injunction should be imprinted on his memory, and find a place in his practice—"Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door."[3] Neglect of these refreshing seasons will lower the tone of his ministry, and give it a cold and unedifying character. In depriving himself of approach to God, his people will suffer by the absence of experimental religion, which will be perceptible in his instructions.

[2] *Pastoral Care*, chap. iv. [3] Matt. vi. 6.

There will be a want of that life and energy of devotion, which are only derived from a close walk with God, and by waiting on him in secret with private communion and prayer. Mr. Cecil asks in his usual striking manner—"What then should a young minister do? His office says—'Go to your books! Go to retirement! Go to prayer!' 'No,' says the enthusiast, 'Go to preach! Go, and be a witness!' A witness! Of what? He does not know."[4] On the other hand, frequent intercourse with God in retirement, seasons of abstraction from the petty cares inseparable from the machinery of parochial ministrations, opportunities for private study of the heart, examination of motives, solemn retrospect of the past, and renewed dedication and consecration of the soul to the work of an evangelist, will send him back to his pulpit and his parish recruited for his public and pastoral duties, with his spirits invigorated, and his hands strengthened, and testifying to his people by his very look and manner, that his conversation has been in heaven. Notice is taken of the effects of these exercises in the account of Dr. Payson's ministry—"The reader may have expected to learn what influence his secret devotions had on the services of the sanctuary; also the result of his public labours in regard to the people to whom

[4] *Remains*, p. 45.

he ministered. It is almost superfluous to add, that they were not without effect. Others 'took knowledge of him that he had been with Jesus.'[5] The solemnity and unction of his social prayers; the earnestness and variety of argument with which he pleaded at the throne of grace; his unyielding importunity for the blessings which he sought, had roused attention, and drawn forth the confession, that the Spirit of the holy God was within him. 'God must help him, or he would never pray so,' said an observing man who had previously professed no regard for religion."[6] Retirement, then, and prayer, must be the restoratives of the christian priesthood; the oil for the lamps before the altar of the Lord; that the servants of his house may experience the fulness of the prophetical promise in the dispensation of the gospel of grace—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."[7]

3. The ordination of Christ to his ministry was marked by the descent of the Spirit, and confirmed subsequently by a voice from heaven, calling on the people to hear him.[8] John re-

[5] Acts iv. 13.

[6] See *Life of Dr. Payson*, p. 38; one of the most interesting specimens of American biography.

[7] Is. xl. 31. [8] Matt. iii. 16, 17; xvii. 5.

ceived his commission direct from God.[9] The disciples were sent forth by a formal command from Christ.[1] Succeeding teachers were afterwards separated under divine guidance for the same work, and solemnly dedicated to it by imposition of hands.[2] What is the doctrine of our own church in this matter, and what is the authority which she considers competent to make choice of fit and able men for the exercise of the ministry, our twenty-third article declares—"It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." There is a weighty remark of one of the sons of our church, which may be well put in juxtaposition with her own language, and serve in the stead of all other comment. "I wish it were well considered by all clerks, what it is to run without being either called or sent; and so to thrust one's self into the vineyard, without staying till God, by his providence, puts

[9] Luke iii. 2. [1] John xx. 21.
[2] Acts xiii 3 2 Tim. i. 6.

a piece of his work in his hands: this will give a man a vast ease in his thoughts, and a great satisfaction in all his labours, if he knows that no practices of his own, but merely the directions of providence, have put him in a post."[3]

[3] *Bp. Burnet's Pastoral Care*, chap. vii.

CHAPTER III.

Peculiarities in the Ministry of Christ incidental to his divine nature.

NOTHING is more humiliating to a mind truly fixed upon God, than the mixture of earthly leaven, which often works within us, and debases the character of our most spiritual pursuits. It continually reminds us of the state of imperfection, to which man has been reduced since sin came into the world; so that in the midst of our desires after holiness we have too often reason to detect our souls cleaving again to their native dust, and in the purest moments of heavenly communion are constrained to mourn over the intrusion of low and worldly associations. Like the apostles, who were heavy with sleep at the moment of the transfiguration of their Lord,[1] it would seem as if the eye of man were not able to contemplate with a steady gaze the highest glories of heaven, even when revelation has removed the veil which shrouded them.

[1] Luke ix. 32.

Those in particular who exercise the ministerial office, have occasion to feel this infirmity more than others. At every step, they meet, in the experience of their own hearts, with fresh evidence of the truth, that they are men of like passions with their fellow men, to whom it is their duty to become as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They themselves have need to learn daily in the school of Christ; and yet they are called upon to bring out of their storehouse things new and old for the instruction of others. At every recurring instance of their own ignorance of spiritual knowledge, they hear their conscience whisper, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"[2] Are the members of their respective flocks subject to be led astray by the temptations of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life? The shepherds and guardians of God's fold are themselves exempt from none of the same trials, and are insensible to none of those allurements which lead away captive the souls they have in charge. Are men averse by nature from the things which belong to their peace? Their teachers also have their own besetting and prevailing affections, which obstruct the progress of spirituality in their souls, and occupy them with those grovelling pursuits by which they are detained from heavenly con-

[2] John iii. 10.

siderations. Are the hearts of many of the hearers of the word harassed with occasional doubts and unbelief, or tempted to a sinful compliance with the prejudices of the world in opposition to the claims of duty? Their spiritual guides, like the chosen leader of the Israelites,[3] are themselves liable to an unadvised distrust of God's power, or of his faithfulness to his promises; or, like the apostle to the circumcision,[4] they may be inclined to overlook the intrusion of dangerous error, through fear of giving offence to received opinions. Are men forced to exercise a perpetual vigilance, lest the great enemy of salvation should find some outwork of the heart unguarded, and enter in, and sow tares among the wheat unawares? Their ministers, also, be they even like Paul himself in zeal and devotion and heavenly-mindedness, are no less obliged to keep under their bodies, and bring them into subjection, lest that by any means, when they have preached to others, they themselves should be castaways.

It is precisely in this respect that the ministry of Christ differs from every other ministry. Every other ministry is derivative,—Christ's alone was original, and distinguished throughout by a manifestation of perfect independence. Every other candlestick in the church shines with borrowed light,—Christ's alone was conspicuous for

[3] Numb. xx. 8—12. [4] Gal. ii. 11—16.

rays proceeding from himself. Other teachers are as earthen vessels, from which the water of life is poured forth in a scanty, and, it may be, in a polluted stream. But Christ is the fountain which supplies them all; the parent source of every fertilizing rill which waters the spiritual vineyard. "Of his fulness have all we received."[5] Other teachers, however high and honourable their office, and however important the word which is given them to speak, are still but delegates, subordinate to some superior power, and sent as stewards under the will of another to execute a particular commission. Christ alone is the head of his own church, supreme in authority, and rendering account to no one for the exercise of his sovereignty. Other teachers -the prophets for instance—received revelations from time to time, and spoke by occasional inspiration, according as the Spirit gave them utterance. But the communion of Christ with God was continual, for he was in the Father, and the Father in him, and he and his Father were one.[6] "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."[7] Other teachers had gifts differing according to circumstances of situation, of talent, of opportunities of usefulness. Some had "the word of wisdom," some "the word of knowledge," some "faith," some "the gifts of healing"

[5] John i. 16. [6] John x. 30; xiv. 10. [7] John i. 18.

and "working of miracles," some "prophecy" or "discerning of spirits," some "divers kind of tongues," or "the interpretation of tongues;"[8] some were "apostles," some "prophets," some "evangelists," some "pastors and teachers."[9] But Christ united in himself all these diversities of gifts, and performed alone all these differences of administrations; he combined in his own person whatever was excellent in the character of each, and afforded in all an example of faultless perfection. God loved him as a son, not as a prophet; and manifested himself to him in proportion to his love. "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. . . . . For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."[1]

It is obvious that our Saviour, as a teacher, derived the most important advantages from this fulness which dwelt in him, even "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."[2]

I. He enjoyed in an indefinite degree unlimited grace from above, and unlimited com-

[8] 1 Cor. xii. 8—10.
[9] Eph. iv. 11.
[1] John iii. 31. 34, 35.
[2] Col. ii. 9.

munications of the Holy Spirit. These were the evidences of his mission, and his qualifications for office. He was like Moses, with whom God would speak "mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches."[3] On him rested, according to the prophecy, "the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;" and made him "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."[4]

The grace that is in others is, in a certain sense at least, restricted, and varies "according to the measure of the gift of Christ;"[5] but that possessed by our Lord during his earthly ministry was infinite and immeasureable. The Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson "at times;" but the dovelike Spirit, which descended on Jesus, was seen "remaining on him."[6] He was "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows."[7] Others have the privilege, and a glorious privilege it is, to go to the fountain-head, and draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation. But Christ had life uncommunicated, inherent in himself; "As the Father hath life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in

[3] Numb. xii. 8. Compare Deut. xxxiv. 10—12.

[4] Is. xi. 2, 3, compared with John i. 32. "It abode upon him."

[5] Eph. iv. 7.

[6] Judges xiii. 25, John i. 33. [7] Heb. i. 9.

himself."[8] He proceeded forth, and came from God, endowed with gifts to which no creature could ever pretend. As nothing was wanting to the completeness of his authority, as "the head of all principality and power," so nothing was wanting to the completeness of the knowledge of him to whom the Spirit was not given by measure.[9] We need not inquire indeed whether, in his human nature, his mental faculties ripened into maturity after the manner of men, and his reasonable soul became susceptible of gradual developement, as his body progressively advanced from infancy to manhood. There are expressions which, taken literally, would seem to lead to this conclusion. "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom." "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."[1] It would appear also by his appearance at twelve years old in the temple, as a disciple among the doctors, hearing, and enquiring, and answering when called upon, that he, who needed not that any should teach him, condescended to sit at the feet of human wisdom, and did not disdain to learn, as man, through the ordinary channels of knowledge. But these are among the secret things which belong unto God; and it becomes us not to attempt

[8] John v. 26. [9] John iii. 34; Col. ii. 10.
[1] Luke ii. 40. 52.

to analyse too closely the hidden mysteries of the incarnation.

The Baptist, though himself a burning and a shining light, freely acknowledged the superiority of our Lord at his first interview, and that it was needful for all preachers of righteousness to desire a portion of the Spirit from his inexhaustible stores, before they could be accepted themselves, or useful to others. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"[2] Nor did John conceal the same truth from his disciples, although the confession might have the effect of decreasing their number, and diminishing the measure of respect paid to himself. He prepared them, not for himself, but for the Lord. He embraced every opportunity of drawing off their attention from his own character, and of magnifying him that should take away the sin of the world. His only boast was that he was sent as a herald before his superior.[3] It was sufficient for him to be the "friend of the bridegroom."[4] "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."[5] "That which is preparatory must give place to that which is perfective; a baptism of water must yield to a

[2] Matt. iii. 14.
[3] John iii. 28.
[4] John iii. 29.
[5] Matt. iii. 11.

baptism of fire; a human instructor must cede to one that is divine."[6] However bright his own beams might appear to a generation sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, they were but reflected from that original and essential light, which was henceforth to lighten the gentiles, and to be the glory of Israel. Like a star which had fulfilled its purpose in the night season, he was content to wane and set, when the sun of righteousness had arisen with healing in his wings. "He must increase," said this mighty preacher of repentance, "but I must decrease."[7] His tongue seems to have delighted in repeating again and again his proper message. "This was he of whom I spake." "There standeth one among you whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me." "Behold the Lamb of God."[8] "Happy the christian minister," says Bp. Horne, "who, like St. John, lives only to point out the Saviour to his people. And happy the people, who, like the two disciples, thereupon follow Jesus, in-

[6] *Bp. Horne On the Life and Death of John the Baptist.*

[7] John iii. 30. On the wisdom of the divine decree which provided that when the ministry of Christ had formally begun, the ministry of the Baptist should cease, and on the proof of the fact itself, see Mr. Greswell's eighth Dissertation *On the Principles and Arrangement of a Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. i.

[8] John i. 15. 26, 27. 29. 36.

quire where he dwelleth, enter in, and abide with him!"[9]

And who shall say that the personal estimation in which John's followers held their master, was lessened by this reverential testimony to him, in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? It is the peculiar property of the spiritual fulness of our Lord, that none can suffer by the contrast of their own imperfection with the height and depth of that abundant grace which is in Christ Jesus. There can be no comparison between the darkness of the most enlightened created being, and that ineffable light which beams around the brows of our Saviour and God, and casts into the shade all the borrowed glories of fallen and finite beings. The forerunner who prepares the way, and makes the paths straight before the approach of some mighty conqueror, may challenge admiration and notice for a time, in the absence of the more important personage; but he sinks into insignificance and neglect, when the object of universal attention, the desire of all nations, comes forward to take his legitimate place, and to claim his own proper rank in the sight of the people.

II. The enjoyment of unlimited power was

[9] *Bp. Horne On the Life and Death of John the Baptist.*

another feature peculiar to the ministry of Christ.

Of whom else do we read, that he "returned in the power of the Spirit,"[1] after sustaining a temptation of unexampled length and difficulty? Or to whom else do we see such supreme and absolute authority committed, as silenced even his most determined enemies? "They were all amazed at the mighty power of God."[2] Our Lord claims this privilege for himself in the last words he addressed to his disciples previously to his ascension, when the reserve, with which he had before declared his attributes, became no longer necessary. "All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth."[3]

This is his first assumption of universal principality, though in particular cases he had partially vindicated his right to it before; and that right had been sometimes unwillingly admitted and acknowledged. "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again." "With authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out." "Even the wind and the sea obey him."[4] He gave, too, the most indisputable proof of the full

[1] Luke iv. 14. [2] Luke ix. 43.

[3] Matt. xxviii. 18.

[4] Matt. viii. 27; ix. 6. Luke iv. 36. John x. 18.

possession of uncontrolled authority, by delegating a portion of it to others. "When he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease." "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you."[5]

This suggests another particular, in which the difference between the originating power of Christ, and the vicarious agency of his followers, is strikingly contrasted. Moses wrought miracles; some of the prophets were gifted with a similar privilege; and the disciples, even during the lifetime of their master, were enabled to perform many wonderful works in his name. Our Lord, therefore, was far from standing alone in the possession of miraculous gifts. But there is something so peculiar and sublime in the manner in which our Saviour exercised functions, which, in one sense, he may be said to have enjoyed only in common with others, that he is not robbed of any portion of his own glory by their admission into a seeming partnership of power. The superior efficacy of his sovereign word is distinguished far above the most successful ministrations of the subordinate agents.

[5] Matt. x. 1; Luke x. 19.

When the afflicted father brought his son to the disciples, possessed with an evil spirit which deprived him of speech and hearing, he besought them to cast him out, and they could not. But when recourse was had to the omnipotence of Jesus, and he had rebuked the devil with that voice which even rebellious spirits dared not disobey, the child was cured from that very hour.[6] As if to teach, that the performance of things impossible even to the most faithful and zealous of his ministers, belongs exclusively to the Lord of all power and might; that we must learn to seek the highest blessings at their source, to address our prayers to the throne of grace through Christ alone, and to rest our dependance simply on the help of his almighty arm. The apostles, gifted as they were with the distinction of extraordinary endowments, never failed to make an open acknowledgment of him under whom they acted, by the power of whose name they were enabled to become the instruments of his mercy. They earnestly disclaimed all pretensions to any honour, but that of bearing the commission of their master, for whose sole glory all the wonders that they wrought were intended. "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man

[6] Matt. xvii. 14—18.

to walk? . . . . . His name" (that of the Holy One and the Just) "through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."[7] And in exact conformity with this acknowledgment of the superior source whence Peter and John derived all their ability to cure, they said to the cripple, when about to work the miracle in his behalf, which excited so much amazement in the Jews, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."[8] How great is the difference between this language of the apostle and that of our Lord on similar occasions—"I will; be thou clean."—"Peace, be still."—"Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."—"Damsel, I say unto thee, arise."[9] Such were the words of sovereignty with which he addressed the objects, on whom the fulness of his almighty power was exercised.

Nor, as has been remarked for the purpose of shewing that Christ was one with, and equal to the Father, "did he ever, except in the case of Lazarus for the sake of the spectators, make any appeal to his Father, or give the least intimation of any power exerted, except what was inherent in himself." The apostles, on the con-

[7] Acts iii. 12. 16. [8] Acts iii. 6.

[9] Matt. viii. 3. Mark iv. 39; v. 34. 41.

trary, perpetually remind the converts of their own weakness and unworthiness; and that even the benefits which individuals had derived from the personal ministry of their teachers were to be attributed to the grace of God which was given them by Jesus Christ, seeing that "in every thing" they were "enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge."[1]

III. Another distinguishing property of our Lord's ministry, is the power he bestows on those who receive with meekness his engrafted word, of advancing progressively to higher degrees of divine knowledge, without other limitation than man's capacity for its reception.

The sphere of instruction proposed in the school of any other master, is more or less contracted in proportion to the nature of the object of study. The attendants on the schools of the prophets would have the advantage, so far as we can judge from the little that is known respecting the institution, of acquiring a competent knowledge of the Jewish law; but their studies would not have qualified them for understanding such subjects as the true character of the Mosaic dispensation, or the spiritual meaning of the sacrifices and ceremonial observances. Like those of whom St. Paul prophesied as about to

[1] 1 Cor. i. 4, 5.

rise in the last days, though "ever learning," they were "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."[2]

Again, the disciples of John the Baptist obtained from the repeated warnings of their master a correct idea of the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, and of the necessity of repentance, but were left totally ignorant of other things, with which it highly imported them to be acquainted. They did not so much as know whether the Holy Ghost were given,[3] and were slow to acknowledge that Christ was the Messiah who should come, though John bare express testimony to the fact.[4] Apollos, who was another of the Baptist's disciples, though eloquent, and mighty in the scriptures, and instructed in the way of the Lord, yet, as "knowing only the baptism of John," required to have "the way of God expounded unto him more perfectly," before he could "shew by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."[5]

But it is a special privilege attending our Lord's doctrine, that it embraces all useful knowledge, and unfolds new objects for meditation, in proportion as we obtain an insight into the first principles of divine truth. If we have

[2] 2 Tim. iii. 7.

[3] Acts xix. 2; compared with John vii. 39.

[4] Acts xix. 2—5. Matt. xi. 3. [5] Acts xviii. 24—28.

begun to attend on Christ, our path will shine "more and more unto the perfect day."[6] The stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well for the inquirer whose soul is athirst for God, and a fountain opened from whence springs up a never-failing source of refreshment. It was no promise of some extraordinary revelation to be granted exclusively to the chosen disciples, but it was to the Jews at large who believed, that Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth;"[7] a declaration which has been fulfilled in favour of those who are taught of God in all ages. The Spirit of truth "guides them into all truth."[8] To them it is given "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven . . . . . for whosoever

[6] Prov. iv. 18.

[7] John viii. 32. See also the blessing promised to obedience, vii. 17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." To the same effect the psalmist had declared long before—"A good understanding have all they that do his commandments." Ps. cxi. 10.

[8] The argument is not materially impaired, even if this text be understood in the limited sense to which Lightfoot restricts it. "The words in John, xvi. 13, are appropriate to the apostles. None ever were, or will be, whom God 'led into all truth,' save the apostles. He leads indeed every saint he hath into all truth needful for him,—but the apostles into all truth needful, both for themselves and the whole church; because God, by them, was to give the rule of faith and manners to all the church."—*Works*, vol. v. p. 211.

hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."[9] The pious longing of Abraham, and the eager desire of Zaccheus, were alike gratified. Salvation came to the house of the one, and Jesus abode with him, because he sought to see him; the other rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he saw it.[1]

The method of God's dealing with the eastern magi was analogous to his customary manner of opening and teaching the heart. All was gradual, and yet progressive. He placed in the heavens the appearance of a star; he attracted their attention to its course; he disposed them to follow its leading; he brought them onwards on their way in faith and hope, till they finally came where the young child was, to derive from the object of their admiration, even in his lowly manger, new lights and a more excellent wisdom than that which they had hitherto cultivated. The very next revelation which was made to them was of a higher order; it was no longer by a star that they were directed, but they were warned by God in a dream to defeat the intentions of Herod, by returning to their country another way.[2]

Such, too, is usually the progress of divine

[9] Matt. xiii. 11, 12. [1] Luke xix. 3—9. John viii. 56.
[2] Matt. ii. 1—12.

grace. Almost imperceptible in its beginnings, like a grain of mustard-seed, it gradually expands and strengthens; and though, while the day of small things lasts, man sees, as it were, through a glass darkly, a blessing is shed on him in his search after truth, until the first glimmering of the star in the east brightens into the glorious light of the sun of righteousness, and all the mercies of redemption are clearly displayed through the angel of the covenant.

Even to the Baptist himself the discovery of Christ was gradual. At first he knew him not, as he twice declares; but only that he should be made manifest to Israel. In the faith of this knowledge he came preparing the way of the Lord, preaching repentance, and baptizing with water. He was speedily requited by the sight of Jesus. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him."[3]

The religious progress of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, as it may be traced in the concise narrative of the evangelists, shews in a similar manner how Christ gives his disciples grace for grace, and strength in proportion to their strength,—a gift which no other teacher could impart to his followers. We read of her, that she listened to our Lord's discourses with that diligent and humble attention which is described

[3] John i. 29. 31. 33.

by the proverbial phrase of sitting at Jesus' feet.[4] Nor was it in vain that her eyes saw, and her ears heard, and her heart pondered upon that wisdom which many prophets and kings under the old dispensation had desired to witness, if the fulfilment of their wish had been consistent with the divine purposes. That pious and prophetic act of love which she soon afterwards performed in the house of Simon the leper, towards the person of him who had raised her brother, and which was to be spoken of as a memorial of her affection wherever the gospel was preached, both shewed how well she had chosen the better part, and how wisely she had profited in improving the advantages of her situation by drinking of the waters of the well of life at the fountain head.[5]

The case of him who was born blind is similar. Though his views of Christ's character were very defective, yet, blind as he was, he had attained to a certain measure of spiritual sight. He knew that one was yet to come, who should

[4] Luke x. 39.

[5] Matt. xxvi. 6—13; compared with John xii. 1—8. I follow Grotius, Michaelis, Doddridge, Scott, and others, in understanding the narrative in these two passages of one and the same anointing. Lightfoot, Whitby, and Macknight are of a different opinion.

"seal up vision and prophecy;"[6] and, like the woman of Samaria, he recognized in Christ the person of a prophet, though not of the Messiah. Nor was he left unrewarded in his walk according to his degree of knowledge. After he had been excommunicated by the members of the sanhedrim, in consequence of the boldness with which he had maintained in their presence that his benefactor was sent from God, Jesus met him privately, and asked him respecting his belief in the promised Messiah. His answer was so full of the earnest yet humble docility of one, who, though he knew not Christ, had unconsciously experienced his grace in his heart, and expressed so much solicitude to become acquainted with the desire of all nations, that it met with an immediate recompence from him who is a rewarder of them that seek him diligently. "He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" Then Jesus, in order that he might be the first to inherit the blessing promised to those who should suffer persecution for his sake, revealed himself as the Messiah, with a degree of freedom very different from the caution usual with our Lord on this subject. "He said unto him, thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee."[7] It would be difficult to find a parallel declaration, except in the re-

[6] Dan. ix. 24. [7] John ix. 24—37.

markable discovery made to the Samaritan woman, "I that speak unto thee, am he."[8]

The new disciple, Nathanael, enjoyed the same privilege under the divine teaching. Strong in his original prejudices, his first impression, on hearing of the Saviour, was to deny that any good thing could come out of Nazareth. An opportunity was given him of forming his own judgment—he complies with Philip's invitation to see and decide for himself—Jesus rewards his candour; expresses his approbation of the simplicity of his character; and, noticing the conviction produced in the new convert's mind by a single instance of his omniscience, promises, that in future he should enjoy greater help for the establishment of his faith. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these."[9]

The character of Nicodemus is another case in point. Every mention of him illustrates some advance of the work of grace in his heart; especially in the overcoming of what was probably his besetting sin—the fear of man. The evangelist, in taking notice of his open profession of attachment to the person of Christ, twice calls attention to the secrecy with which he first came

[8] John iv. 26. [9] John i. 50.

to our Lord by night, as if to make us admire the change wrought in him under the divine teaching, and to trace his subsequent boldness, in ranging himself on the unpopular side, to the effects of his conversation with Jesus.[1]

Our Lord dealt similarly with the disciples going to Emmaus. They eagerly drank in his exposition of himself out of Moses and the prophets; and when, on drawing nigh to the village, he made as though he would have gone further, they urged him with importunity to abide with them, that they might continue to profit by the instructions of one who would be as apt to teach when sitting in the house, as when walking by the way. Then, says the evangelist, "he went in to tarry with them." The sequel beautifully illustrates the progress of divine teaching on the heart, through grace. As he went by the way he had opened to them the scriptures, which testified of himself, and had made them wiser in what was written. As he sat at meat with them, he made a further discovery of heavenly things, and was known unto them in blessing and breaking of bread. And then, lastly, the veil which had been already taken from the scriptures, was taken from their understandings; the finishing stroke was put to the work

[1] Compare John iii. 2, with vii. 50, and xix. 39.

of conversion; the revelation was completed; "their eyes were opened, and they knew him."[2]

But above all, the encouragement afforded for the improvement of any talent connected with our christian calling may be well illustrated by the account given of Apollos. When he began his ministry he had a very contracted view of the nature of his office. But his zeal, according to his measure of knowledge, imperfect as it was, became the occasion of bringing him to the notice of Aquila and Priscilla, and, through their instrumentality, to a more full acquaintance with the purposes of God respecting the redemption of man. Then it was that "he helped them much which had believed through grace; for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ."[3] Nor was the change in the disciple John less remarkable. Originally he was one of the "sons of thunder;"[4] and the impetuosity of character which led Christ to apply this surname to him, is marked in his hasty proposal to call down fire from heaven to consume the inhabitants of a village which refused to admit our Lord.[5] But observe the temper of the same apostle afterwards, when he was composing the three epistles which bear his

[2] Luke xxiv. 28—31.
[3] Acts xviii. 24—28.
[4] Mark iii. 17.
[5] Luke ix. 54.

name. Compare the language in which he addresses his little children in the Lord, and the elect lady, and the well-beloved Gaius, with the uncharitable feeling which marked his early attendance on Jesus.[6] The affectionate manner in which he expatiates throughout on the love of God to man, and again and again pathetically enforces on believers love to each other by every imaginable motive, is worthy of him whom Jesus loved, and who had such intimate opportunities of studying the great principle of the gospel in the very bosom of its author.

Thus it was that the disciples enjoyed advantages, which, when duly improved, enlarged their minds for the admission of all the treasures of divine truth, and filled them with the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Christ. Day by day new prospects opened to their view —facts, which could only have been known to them by inspiration, were revealed[7]—remaining prejudices were gradually dispelled—the purposes of God's counsels were made known in clearer demonstrations, and their capacities were quickened in a manner which bespoke the divine

[6] 1 John ii. 1. 2 John 1. 3 John 1.

[7] As, for instance, the circumstances attendant on our Lord's agony, which he does not appear to have related personally. See *Proofs of Inspiration*, by the late Rev. T. Rennell, p. 5, and note.

perfection of him who thus gave them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries were unable to gainsay. Like their heavenly master himself, in the developement at least, though not in the measure, of their attainments, they grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon them.[8]

IV. The last characteristic of the ministry of Christ which requires to be mentioned in connection with this subject, the authority with which he spoke, was in a great measure the natural result of those peculiarities which have been already considered. This qualification was observed in an early stage of his labours, and seems to have excited more attention than any of the other external advantages of his teaching. "The people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."[9] Corresponding testimony is borne to the power of his word, in nearly similar language, by two of the other evangelists."[1]

Our Lord once said to the Jews, "Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world, I am not of this world."[2] It is precisely this distinction, which gives a weight to his in-

[8] Luke ii. 40.
[9] Matt. vii. 29.
[1] Mark i. 22. Luke iv. 32.
[2] John viii. 23.

structions, not to be attained by any human teacher of religion. The earthy vessel must in some degree defile the doctrine which it contains, whatever may be the purity of its heavenly original. And yet, if even the man Stephen were so filled with power by the Holy Ghost, that his enemies "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake;[3] what must have been the mighty effect of our Saviour's language, proceeding from the lips of him who was master and head of all, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven! "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"[4]

God had of old given the law from mount Sinai; and the terrors with which its delivery were accompanied, were sufficient to shew the sanctity and awe, with which its precepts were to be regarded. But Moses, who was the channel of its communication, takes care to impress upon the minds of the people that their allegiance was due, not to himself, but to a higher power. "Thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord thy God, and do his commandments which I command thee."[5] Not so our Lord, who,

[3] Acts vi. 10. [4] Jer. xxiii. 29.

[5] Deut. xxvii. 10.

speaking with more authority, though not with a voice which shook the earth, vindicates to himself a power from which there is no appeal; which extends or limits, which enforces or annuls, as the case may require, whatever has been sanctioned by the will of previous legislators, whether human or divine. He speaks in the style and character of a sovereign,[6] and "where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?"[7] "Ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill—thou shalt not commit adultery—thou shalt not forswear thyself—but I say unto you"[8]—that the spiritual import of these commands has a much more extensive signification than you conceive, and forbids not only murder, and adultery, and perjury, but all anger, all impurity of the heart, all extra-judicial appeals to God in confirmation of testimony. This was indeed the commanding voice of the beloved Son, to which his Father had solemnly invited all the people of the earth to listen. "Hear ye him."[9]

[6] So Jerome and Theophylact and others explain the authority with which Christ spoke. Others, however, affirm, that this would be contrary to his prophetic office, and to the declaration that his doctrine was not his own, but his that sent him. See John vii. 16—18; viii. 28; xii. 49; xiv. 10.

[7] Eccles. viii. 4. [8] Matt. v. 27—37.

[9] Matt. xvii. 5.

Such were some of the peculiarities in the ministry of Christ, incidental to his divine nature. Who shall estimate their importance? Who shall measure the greatness of that superiority at which they place our Lord above all other teachers? Yet even from the height of his pre-eminence he deigns to give to christian ministers in all succeeding ages an example of that spirit of prayer, in which all their labours for the cure of souls, if they would expect success, must be conducted. It might have been imagined that if such were the perfections exhibited in the ministry of Jesus, which stood in need of no extraneous support, and laboured under no deficiency, prayer would be a work of supererogation, and secret communion with his heavenly Father, for the purpose either of thanksgiving, supplication or intercession, a needless service. If any one could have been exempt from the duty of letting his requests "in every thing be made known unto God,"[1] it surely would have been he to whom the Spirit was committed without measure, and to whom, being himself "one with the Father," the Father had given "to have life in himself."[2]

Yet prayer may be said to have been the habitual language of our Lord. Nothing of importance was done by him without it. When the

[1] Phil. iv. 6. [2] John v. 26.

Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape upon him, he was "praying," in preparation for this anointing to the public ministry.[3] After his baptism, instead of going up at once to Jerusalem, and entering upon the public duties of his mission, he retired into the wilderness for fasting and communion with God previously to his temptation.[4] He continued all night solitary in prayer previously to his sermon on the mount.[5] He seems indeed to have given up as much time to prayer as to preaching; and the repose of the night was as much too long for him without communion with heaven, as the day itself without employment in his mission. After a sabbath employed in teaching the people, and the evening of the same day in working miracles, he rose up very early in the morning, "and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed," previously to his first extensive progress throughout all Galilee.[6] The choice of his apostles took place after an entire night spent in prayer.[7] Many of his most important miracles were preceded or followed by prayer.[8] He did not feed the five thousand, or approach the grave of Lazarus, without having first offered solemn prayer.[9] He

[3] Luke iii. 21. [4] Matt. iv. 1.
[5] Luke vi. 12. [6] Mark i. 35—39. Luke iv. 42—44.
[7] Luke vi. 12. [8] Mark vi. 46.
[9] Matt. xiv. 19. John xi. 41.

was praying when he was transfigured.[1] He had been praying with his disciples apart, before he led to that memorable conversation, in which, for the first time, he owned to them that he was the Messiah, and commended Peter for his ready acknowledgment of him in that character.[2] When his hour was come, before he went out of the guest chamber, where he had celebrated his last passover, he entered upon that solemn act of intercession, in which he committed his apostles, and future christians throughout all ages, to his heavenly Father's keeping.[3] Immediately before he was to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, he took three of his disciples apart in the garden of Gethsemane, as witnesses of the mode in which he strengthened his soul by prayer for support under the sufferings which were about to assault it.[4] And, finally, his first and last words on the cross were the words of prayer.[5]

The intense earnestness, it might be almost said the importunity, of our Lord's prayers, is also worthy remark. As he prayed "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." "Again he went away and prayed, and spake the same words."[6] It seems

[1] Luke ix. 28, 29.
[2] Luke ix. 18—21, compared with Matt. xvi. 13—20.
[3] John xvii.
[4] Matt. xxvi. 36. 39. 42. 44.
[5] Luke xxiii. 24. 46.
[6] Luke xxii. 44. Mark xiv. 39.

as if he would give an illustration of the moral of his own parable, that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint."[7] It was in the true apprehension of his master's spirit that Paul "besought the Lord thrice," that "the messenger of Satan" might depart from him.[8]

But it must not be on Paul alone, among the ministers and stewards of Christ's mysteries, that the praying spirit of their master should rest. The christian pastor will retire at times, day by day, from his more busy and active duties, to seek a blessing at his Lord's hand.[9] He will appeal to our Saviour's sympathy with human wants, and to that knowledge of our infirmities, which caused him to withdraw into privacy the companions of his earthly ministry, for the purposes of meditation and prayer. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile."[1] He will wrestle earnestly for the de-

[7] Luke xviii. 1. [8] 2 Cor. xii. 8.

[9] "Sive autem apud populum vel apud quoslibet jamjamque dicturus, sive quod apud populum dicendum, vel ab eis qui voluerint aut potuerint legendum est dictaturus, oret ut Deus sermonem bonum det in os ejus. Si enim regina oravit Esther, pro suæ gentis temporaria salute locutura apud regem, ut in os ejus Deus congruum sermonem daret; quanto magis orare debet, ut tale munus accipiat, qui pro æterna hominum salute in verbo et doctrina laborat?"—*Augustin. De Doctrina Christiana*, lib. iv. cap. xxx.

[1] Mark vi. 31.

sired grace. He will not put up a faint and languid prayer, and leave it as it were on the altar of his Lord, a censer without incense, or a lamp without oil; but he will "lift up holy hands, without doubting,"[2] again and again, with no intermission, as Moses of old;[3] like one who really believes that the promise will be fulfilled, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."[4] His language will be that of Jacob —"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."[5] And, though he wait for it, yet the blessing will come at the appointed time; for "he who exhorts his flock to watchfulness and prayer, is sure to make an impression on them, if they see him watch and pray himself."[6]

Lastly, we are to recollect that the communication of spiritual blessings to the children of God is the effect and consequence of our great teacher's own fulness. "Of his fulness have all we received." "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," that the whole body of believers should be "complete in him."[7] It is, therefore, through this attribute that Christ is made unto us the inexhaustible source of every

[2] 1 Tim. ii. 8.
[3] Exod. xvii. 12.
[4] John xv. 7.
[5] Gen. xxvii. 26.
[6] *Quesnel* on Matt. xxvi. 41.
[7] Col. i. 19; ii. 10.

blessing which it is his province to confer—our "wisdom," our "righteousness," our "sanctification, and redemption."[8]

From this source the minister derives that unction, which gives life and spirit to his teaching. The word which is in his mouth has no efficacy in itself, unless a healing and edifying power be given it by him who is himself the anointed of God. Though the scribes taught in the synagogues, and read the book of the law, it was to no purpose; the people remained insensible under their ministrations. But when Christ opened his mouth, "all that heard him were astonished," and asked, "from whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him?"[9] Whence this difference? "The grace of God was upon him."[1] The dependance of the minister must be fixed upon the same source of power. His Lord says to him, as to his first disciples, "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes." "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist."[2] "It is a great comfort to Christ's ministers, in their administration of the outward signs, that

[8] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[1] Luke ii. 40.
[9] Luke ii. 47. Mark vi. 2.
[2] Luke x. 4; xxi. 15.

he whose ministers they are can confer the grace signified thereby, and so put life, and soul, and power into their ministrations; can speak to the heart what they speak to the ear, and breathe upon the dry bones on which they prophesy."[3]

[3] *Henry* on John i. 33.

CHAPTER IV.

Peculiarities in the Ministry of Christ, incidental to the Novelty of the Religion.

At the season of our Lord's advent as prophet of the church, that part of the world which was selected for the scene of his personal ministry, had been long in possession of a religious system closely interwoven with the civil polity of the nation, and stamped with the authority of heaven by the miraculous manner in which it had been originally communicated.

During the lapse of fifteen centuries this system had been handed down from generation to generation, identified with the earliest feelings of the people, and cherished with their latest breath; its records forming their principal, if not their only written learning, and its study furnishing a stated employment to their wisest men. So intimately were the observances of the ceremonial law connected with the recurrence of cer-

tain times and seasons, that none of the ordinary concerns of life could be carried on without bringing to mind the religious government under which the nation was placed, and thus carrying back the thoughts amid the temporal cares of life to the contemplation of that Providence, on whose almighty will the whole chain of human events depends. The annual meetings of all classes of the people at the central seat of worship would serve to give consistency and agreement to the general feeling, and would consolidate a large number of individuals, holding the same faith and expectations, under the form of one united and eminently national religious body.

Provision was thus effectually made, as far as external ordinances could provide, against any separation from the covenant; and the spirit of schism would be discouraged, if not altogether checked, in the very outset. Under such a system, any innovation on the hereditary belief, which, if introduced into the remoter provinces, might have escaped notice in ordinary cases till it became formidable by the accession of numerous adherents, would immediately attract attention in a quarter vested with authority to suppress it; and hence conformity to the established order of things would be preserved

pure and universal through every part of the Jewish empire.

To interfere with a religion thus fenced in by the solemnities of an imposing antiquity, and fortified by its hold on the affections and habits of the people, would obviously be a work attended with no ordinary difficulty. Even the prophets who appeared under the old dispensation, without proclaiming any change in the terms and regulations of the existing covenant, had experienced no inconsiderable opposition. The assurances which they gave of the approaching advent of a Messiah, who should be set up for the light, as well as for the salvation of his church, were so contrary to the current of prevailing opinions, that the promulgators of these truths were received with distrust and coldness; and in some cases they were requited for their prophecies with imprisonment or death.

When, therefore, a teacher appeared in the very centre of Judea, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the temple, whose doctrines were so far from coinciding with the received system, that they virtually superseded the whole mechanism of the old economy, and who destroyed that most important feature of the Jewish faith, which formed the very ground-work of

their eternal hopes, their federal title to salvation; instead of meeting with minds prepared for the ready acceptance of his preaching, and listening with humble complacency to his revelation of the heavenly message, there was an instant decision in favour of the constituted religious authorities; and the Jews of all classes and conditions rallied as it were with one accord around the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, against the God of the new covenant, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Owing to the operation of these causes, it not only became necessary for our Lord to contend with the jealousy, which would be excited by the appearance of a new and popular expounder of the law, whose mode of teaching, without reference to the subject of his precepts, was favourably contrasted by the multitude with the proud or frivolous manner of the scribes and Pharisees; but he had also to surmount all the prejudices attendant upon new doctrines and new terms, and to overcome the misconceptions, to which the originality of the dispensation would inevitably give birth. For the Jews had much to unlearn, as well as to learn, before they could receive Jesus in the character of a prophet; and if he received no honour in his own country, it was due in fact as much to the strength of the national attachment

in favour of the Mosaic institutions, as to the unpopularity of the new religion.

The very expressions of our Saviour's first address, as reported by St. Mark, were such as would astonish men, who believed that they and their ancestors had been already in possession for many centuries of an inalienable title to eternal life. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel."[1]

Acquainted as we are through the scriptures with the prejudices and ignorance of the age, what can we conceive of the notion, which a Jew would entertain of the fulfilment of any limited time, when a period should be assigned to those privileges, of which he had been so long in the undisturbed enjoyment? What would he understand of any kingdom of God distinct from that of which his own nation had been the exclusive subjects? or, if that kingdom were to be renewed and extended, he would connect the announcement of such an event with all the dignity and grandeur of sovereignty, and would desire to welcome its approach as the signal for release from civil slavery, and the obnoxious yoke of a foreign power. They who had hitherto counted for righteousness the observance of the ceremonial law, would listen with little interest to a new

[1] Mark i. 15.

and unexpected call to repentance. They who had boasted that they had Abraham to their father, and looked upon their title to the character and inheritance of sons as indefeasible, would reluctantly exchange their actual possession of an hereditary adoption, for a promised expectancy under the gospel, which they must be born again, and lead a new life, to inherit. They would have to lay afresh the foundations of their whole faith; and while they remained shut up in the narrowness of their original creed, our Saviour's doctrine would be as foolishness to them; and the kingdom of God, though it might come to them in exhortation, and argument, and word, would not be received in power.

It was, therefore, requisite that, before our Lord could procure admission into the hearts of his hearers, the veil of misconception, which rested upon their darkened understandings, should be torn away. Pharisees and Sadducees must have previously sacrificed at the foot of his cross their respective opinions, and must have joined in the confession of one universal, though humiliating truth, that all had sinned—all had come short of the glory of God—all stood alike in need of a new way of salvation, which should be as free a gift as the pardon from sin which preceded it. It behoved that the first step should be the removal of error; the purging of the

heart from the doctrines of Judaism, in order to erect in their place the superstructure of the purer faith of christianity, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone of the building.

Add to this that, in proportion as the first dispensation was eminently a self-justifying covenant, the terms of which were not grace but works; there would be additional difficulty in bending the spirit of mankind to the reception of a diametrically opposite principle, and bringing it under the influence of the novel doctrines of the covenant of redemption, the terms of which were not works but grace. A new feeling must have been entertained respecting the extent and tendency of "the law," (as the Jews emphatically termed their religious code,) before they could listen in simple acquiescence to the words of one, who taught in effect that the law was only a "school-master to bring them to Christ,"[2] and that what they could not procure a title to under the law, as a right, the gospel, if accepted, would freely confer on the most outcast and destitute among them, as a gracious boon without money and without price. To those that believed in these doctrines, Christ would indeed be precious; but to the great majority of the nation he would be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence.

[2] Gal. iii. 24.

I. This state of the world would give a peculiar character to the method pursued by our Lord in the execution of his personal ministry. As a preliminary measure to the propagation of the truth, he must dispel the false medium through which the Jews would be inclined to view him, by unfolding his real character, and the real nature of his mission.

It would be objected to him by some, that no good thing could come out of Nazareth. He would challenge them to come and see, and judge by the signs that he worked and the doctrines that he preached, whether he were not indeed the Christ, although dwelling in a despised city of proverbial disrepute.[3] Others would allege the meanness of his parentage,[4] and the persecution or neglect with which he met,[5] as the motives of their unbelief. He would remind them, that it was written concerning him, that he should be "lowly"—"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."[6] Few or none would be prepared to expect him as a prophet.[7] He would tell them, that he was the light of the world, and that the words that he spake were spirit and life to them that believed.[8] A very small remnant of Israel would be found looking

[3] John i. 46.
[4] Luke iv. 22. John vi. 42.
[5] John xii. 48.
[6] Zech. ix. 9. Is. liii. 3.
[7] See p. 15, note 1.
[8] John vi. 63; vii. 12.

for a spiritual kingdom, which should be neither here nor there, in a local and visible appearance, but in the hearts of his servants. He would tell the carnal multitude that his kingdom was not of this world, and that flesh and blood could not inherit it.[9] Very few, like Anna the prophetess, and the friends that companied with her, would be "looking for redemption in Jerusalem."[1] He would declare himself to his unbelieving countrymen as the salvation prepared before the face of all people.[2] The great majority of his hearers would pride themselves upon their respect for their lawgiver, and under the pretence of his authority would refuse to hearken to one greater than Moses, who taught amongst them.[3] Christ would retort upon them, that there was one that accused their unbelief—even Moses in whom they trusted;—since had they believed Moses, they would have believed Christ; for he wrote of him.[4]

In all these respects his province would rather be to shew what the Jewish law was not, and what the prophet of the gospel was not, than to expound the doctrines and duties of christianity in all their various ramifications, and to carry the new disciple through the several bearings of the system. The simple declaration of himself

[9] John xviii. 36.
[2] Luke ii. 30, 31.
[1] Luke ii. 38.
[3] John ix. 28, 29.
[4] John v. 45, 46.

as the way, the truth, and the life, sufficed to overthrow the main principle on which the Mosaic covenant rested; and it will appear, therefore, to have been our Lord's practice rarely to dwell on any thing more than the general outline of his religion, which he left to be filled up after his ascension by other hands, though still guided in every touch by his own practical teaching, and informed throughout by the never-failing inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Owing to these circumstances, he generally selected the refutation of the prominent errors of his hearers, as the channel for communicating a knowledge of the truth.

If his hearer were a Pharisee, our Lord's discourses would commonly tend to lead him to a more spiritual apprehension of the promises of the gospel by an exposure of the formal and hypocritical services of his sect.[5]

If he were a Sadducee, the mode of address would be changed, and a previous argument to convince him of the existence of a future state of retribution, would pave the way to his knowledge respecting our Lord's heavenly kingdom, and the way by which admission into it was offered.[6]

With a Gentile, on the contrary, the first step

[5] Matt. xv. 1—14; xxiii. Luke vi. 7—9; xi. 37—44.

[6] Matt. xxii. 23—32.

would be to teach him to believe in the extension of Jewish privileges to the heathen world, and to look for the dawn of the sun of righteousness on the benighted nations of paganism, before he could sit as a disciple at the feet of Jesus, and acknowledge him in faith as the Lamb of God, through whom was "granted also to the Gentiles repentance unto life."[7] Thus wisely did the ministry of Christ vary with circumstances, and receive a peculiar tone from its adaptation to the errors of the time, which must not be overlooked when it is taken as a pattern for imitation.

And here a question arises, how far the situation of the christian world, at any time since the introduction of the gospel, has resembled the state of things which prevailed at the advent of our Lord. Or, in other words, whether the christian preacher, like our Saviour, has to combat error before he can establish truth—to destroy the bulwarks of Satan, before he can set up the ensign of Christ.

A glance at the eighteen centuries which have elapsed since the birth of our Saviour, will afford abundant proof, that no essential difference exists in this respect between the task of the founder of the church, and that of his stewards and ministers in succeeding ages. The cross of Christ

[7] Matt. xv. 22—28. Acts xi. 18.

has not taken away the original fault of man's fallen nature; it has only provided a means for the salvation of the believer, and revealed the knowledge of that means. Human conduct, allowing for the modifications arising from the change of times, the progress of civilization, the manners of the country, or the insensible effects of a purer creed on the habits of the people, is fundamentally the same, under all circumstances, when men are not under the influence of religious principle. The resistance which the heart opposes to the doctrines of the gospel, whether it be preoccupied or not with opinions contrary to the truth, is due to its natural tendency, rather than to disturbing causes of an accidental and temporary kind.

Doubtless this tendency derived additional strength in Judea from the religious principles of the nation, which, owing to the nature of the Mosaic covenant, were little calculated to counteract it;—but, so long as man is not of himself inclined to yield a spontaneous acquiescence to the humbling doctrines of christianity,—so long as there is a law in our members warring against the law of our mind,—so long as the flesh and the spirit have different sympathies, different desires, different objects of enjoyment and ultimate pursuit,—so long will it be necessary to begin the work of christian teaching

in the eradication of error ; and to lay a foundation for the elements of the faith in its scriptural purity, by expelling from the strongholds of the heart the spirit of practical unbelief inherent in our nature. Experience shews that, even in a christian land, there is a necessity for continual watchfulness, lest opinions should be imbibed inconsistent with the doctrines of the gospel, or the corruptions of the world debase the standard of spiritual holiness. Heresies sprang up as early as during the lifetime of the apostles ; and every succeeding age has been but too fertile in reviving ancient error, or in producing its own forms of deviation from scriptural truth. The corruption of the unregenerate heart, the real character and extent of its enmity against God, the freedom of the gift of eternal life, the nature and need of grace, the province of Christ as a sanctifier through the Holy Spirit from the power of sin, as well as a redeemer from its penalty, and the inapplicability of any other mode of salvation to the circumstances of man's case, are topics which must always be as prominent in addresses to the nominally christian world, as in our Lord's discourses to his Jewish or Gentile hearers. The mind must be dispossessed of whatever belief is in opposition to the fundamental truths of religion, before the doctrines of christianity can make an effectual lodgment in the heart, or as-

sume an adequate influence over the tenor of human conduct.

II. There is another peculiarity observable in our Lord's preaching, which, like the subject of the preceding remarks, is also in some degree incidental to the prior religious belief of his Jewish auditors.

The opposition which the rulers of the nation offered to the introduction of the gospel, was for the most part founded ostensibly on their attachment to their own hereditary creed. It was important, therefore, for the promulgator of the christian revelation to shew, that, had they rightly understood their own prophets, the actual appearance of the Messiah would have been found in no respect at variance with the promise of his coming; and that the law might have become the schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, had they suffered it to occupy the province for which it was originally designed. Hence the references to Jewish partialities and writers, to Jewish history and opinions, to well known and acknowledged facts, which occur so frequently in our Saviour's conversations. To the traditions indeed which had corrupted the scriptures, there is no allusion, except for the purpose of disapproval or refutation, because our Lord would not sanction what had nullified the writ-

ten word, even by indirectly availing himself of their authority.

But when he addresses himself to the reasoning faculty of the Pharisees,—a mode of discourse very common with him,—he sends them at once to the law and to the prophets, and brings his arguments home to their understandings by enlisting on his side the weight of their undisputed testimony.

In this way he proved the resurrection of the dead from the language of Moses at the bush.[8] He defended the disciples from the charge of profaning the sabbath day, by quoting the conduct of David on a similar emergency.[9] He silenced the displeasure of the high priests, when the children received him with hosannas in the temple, by asking, with apparent surprise, whether they had never read, that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God had perfected praise.[1] He had just before availed himself of the authority of a text from Isaiah, on the occasion of cleansing his Father's house from the profanations which had defiled it. And in general it may be remarked, that there was no mode by which he so often defended himself against accusation, or suppressed rising opposition, as by referring to

[8] Luke xx. 37, compared with Ex. iii. 6.

[9] Matt. xii. 3—6, compared with 1 Sam. xxi. 6.

[1] Matt. xxi. 16, compared with Ps. viii. 2.

the Jewish scriptures, and thus protecting himself from the bitterness of their hatred under the shelter of their own pretended standard.

The evangelists, following their Lord's example, have shewn the same consideration in adapting their language and arguments to the particular circumstances of those for whom their gospels were written. St. Matthew wrote for the Jews, and, as a competent judge has observed, "whatever is characteristic in his gospel has a plain reference to the condition, manners, and principles of this people."[2] St. Mark wrote for Jewish and Gentile converts, and the attentive reader will be at no loss to discover passages evidently designed for the instruction of both classes of believers.[3] St. Luke wrote for the Gentile converts alone; and hence his frequent interpretations of scriptural or Jewish allusions[4] —his explanations of the nature of the soul, and

[2] *Townson's Discourses on the Four Gospels*, Disc. iv. sect. v.

[3] For the Jews, see Mark vii. 3—13; x. 2—12; xi. 12—14; xii. 28—31; xiii. 6. 21—23; xiv. 55—59; xv. 11. For the Gentiles, the assertion of the unity of the Godhead in refutation of polytheism, xii. 29. 32, 33—abrogation of legal ordinances, xvi. 16. It is observable that there are only two passages in St. Mark where reference is made to the Old Testament, i. 2, 3, and xv. 28.

[4] Luke i. 8—10. 59; ii. 23. 41; xx. 27, &c.

of its state after death[5]—his omissions of appeal to the Mosaic law[6]—and of prophecies applicatory to the Messiah.[7] On the other hand, John's gospel was principally designed for the refutation of false doctrine, and for the confirmation of churches already planted in the faith once delivered to the saints; and hence those explicit declarations on the subject of the Godhead of Christ,[8] and of the office of the Holy Spirit,[9] for which we find no parallel in the other evangelists.

The practice of the disciples and first preachers of the gospel, as we learn from the Acts of the apostles, was the same. In addressing the Jews, a comparison of the life and ministry of our Saviour with the circumstances predicted of him in the Jewish writings, was the line of argument to which they most commonly resorted.[1] They spoke as Jews unto Jews, and availed themselves of the prepossessions of their countrymen to

[5] Luke viii. 55, where see Grotius. xvi. 9.

[6] Luke vi. 31, compared with Matt. vii. 12; xi. 42, compared with Matt. xxiii. 23.

[7] The only reference is the short quotation from Is. liii. in Luke xxii. 37.

[8] John i. 1—14. [9] John xiv—xvii.

[1] Trypho the Jew says to Justin Martyr, "I would not have heard you if you had not referred every thing to scripture."—*Dial. cum Tryphone*, p. 254. Ed. Thirlby; quoted by Townson, *Discourses on the Four Gospels*. Disc. iv. sect. v.

create an interest in the gospel of the Messiah. It was thus that Philip converted to the christian faith the eunuch, who, though not a Jew by birth, had embraced the Jewish faith; preaching to him Jesus from the scriptures, and explaining the perfect agreement of facts, which had actually taken place within the knowledge of living witnesses, with the prophecies delivered so many centuries before.[2] St. Peter reminds the Jews at the feast of Pentecost of David's prophecy of the resurrection of Christ, and concludes from the fulfilment of this single prediction, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ.[3] St. Paul's custom in the synagogues was similar; alleging that Jesus "must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead[4]—or, in other words, that Messias, when he came in the flesh, must of necessity fulfil the things spoken of him in the prophets. And, again, before Agrippa, "expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews," he speaks of the prophets and Moses, and the hope of the promise made to their fathers, as in the presence of one who had "more perfect knowledge of that way."[5]

[2] Acts viii. 35.

[3] Acts ii. 25—36. See also his discourse to the Jews, Acts iii. 13. 18. 22—26.

[4] Acts xvii. 3. Compare xiii. 16—41.

[5] Acts xxvi. 3; xxiv. 22.

But with the Gentiles the apostles adopted a different mode of reasoning. To Cornelius, Peter preaches Jesus as "judge of quick and dead," through whose name believers should receive "remission of sins."[6] Paul entreats the men of Lycaonia to turn from the vanities of their idolatrous ceremonies to the living God.[7] To the Athenian worshippers at the altar of the unknown God, he declares, that he who made the world, and all things therein, could not be likened "unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device;" and that he had "appointed a day in the which he would judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he had ordained."[8]

The christian preacher, whose situation as regards his congregation differs, in many respects,

[6] Acts x. 42, 43. [7] Acts xiv. 15.

[8] Acts xvii. 23—31. "In the different discourses of St. Paul before Felix and Agrippa, we have another instance of the discernment and prudence with which he accommodated his mode of reasoning to the intellectual, or moral peculiarities of his hearers. To Felix, a heathen in religion, and a profligate in practice, he argued upon those principles of right and wrong, which even the heathens understood and acknowledged, for the duties of righteousness and temperance," &c. . . . . "But in his pleading before Agrippa, who was 'expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews,' he appeals both to the writings of the Old Testament, and to the received opinions and constant traditions of his nation."—*Bp. Blomfield's Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles*, lect. xii.

both from that of our Lord and of his apostles towards their respective hearers, will perceive by these examples that, though the message itself must be the same, some latitude of imitation is permitted him in the mode of delivering it, under a state of things dissimilar to the early times of the gospel. Christ has given us a pattern of the ministry, not with an intent that it should be servilely copied through succeeding ages, without respect of persons or times; but to be observed in spirit and meaning, under the exercise of a reasonable judgment, and with a due consideration to the change which an alteration of circumstances may render necessary.

Frequent evils have resulted from a want of attention to this principle;—language inapplicable to the existing state of the world has been used indiscriminately, by which some have been perplexed, others offended,—a confusion of terms has been created, often tending to the serious corruption of the doctrines of the gospel,—absurdities have arisen, in no way justly chargeable on christianity itself, or its institutions; but originating solely in the injudicious, though often well-meant, tone adopted by some of its advocates. Certain it is, that there are eternal and definite truths which are unchangeable—that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for

ever"[9]—that the fundamental principles of his religion must be presented always in the same unvarying form, simple, unbending, and immutable. In these points, to change would be to corrupt—to omit would be to incur the woe pronounced on every one who diminishes aught from the book of life.[1] But though the general outline of the christian system must remain the same, and stand for ever as a faithful model and memorial of times past to times present and times future; some of its constituent features, with perfect propriety and fidelity to the original, may be suffered for a season to remain in the back ground, while others require to be displayed in a fuller light, and to occupy the prominent place in the canvas. In allotting to each subject its proper share of importance, there is scope for judgment, and discrimination, and comparison; and in the exercise of these faculties it will be best discerned, whether we have really imbibed the spirit of Christ as our teacher, or whether a seeming outward likeness, without any transforming principle within, is the only fruit we have gained from a course of study in his school.

There can be no doubt, for instance, that the confirmation of the truth of christianity by the fulfilment of prophecy, must be an important

[9] Heb. xiii. 8. [1] Rev. xxii. 19.

branch of christian preaching at any stage of the church's existence. But to bring forward this testimony as frequently as it occurs in the gospels and Acts of the apostles, is more seasonable when the seed is first planted, than when it has already taken root, and been watered, and begun to bring forth its spiritual increase. The subject formed almost the exclusive evidence dwelt upon by our Lord, because it was particularly appropriate for the conviction of the keepers of those sacred records to which appeal was made; but were it to occupy as large a share in doctrinal discourses at the present day, other proofs must be omitted which equally require to be enforced, and a part only would be brought forward, instead of the whole of the argument with which we are now furnished in behalf of the gospel. Other internal evidences will be urged with propriety, in proportion as we recede from the primitive times, and as the certainty that Christ was indeed the child of promise becomes more universal; so that none who are in possession of the prophecies continue still to "look for another,"[2] one infatuated race of people only excepted.

III. A similar caution should be observed in

[2] Matt. xi. 3.

the use of some of the terms employed by our Lord.

For instance, the separation of the world into the two classes of Gentiles and Jews, (which was then the current division,) has probably given a strength to some of the passages where they are set in strong opposition, which may render them unfit for general application in a society altogether formed of professing christians. Those who are standing near the pale, may be excluded for ever by the offence taken at some incautious classification, which seems to forget the shades and gradations of character, which exist in a country where the gospel has been preached for many centuries. Terms of strict propriety under the circumstances which originally gave birth to them, require to be closely examined before they are pressed into a service for which they may have been never intended, and employed with reference to persons situated very differently from those to whom our Lord applied them. Let it never be forgotten, however, that the distinction, which must always be preserved between those who have embraced the truth in "power," and those who have only received it in "word,"[3] must not be neutralized, by taking away the broad line of demarcation which actually separates them. The

[3] 1 Cor. iv. 20.

worldly must be told "not to be conformed to this world;" and that, since "the friendship of the world is enmity with God, whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."[4] The man who is really Gentile in heart, a heathen in principle and practice, whatever be his profession, whether living in a christian or pagan land, must hear plainly the doom of those who are "without God in the world,"[5] and continue to despise his long-suffering and goodness, which would bring them to repentance.

So too with regard to our Lord's charge to his apostles--"take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak"[6]—it would be no less than presumptuous arrogance, amounting to a temptation of Providence, if the command were to be transferred, without reservation or allowance, from the first inspired propagators of the gospel to their successors in the ministry at the present day. The insufficiency of human means, in themselves, as well as the submission of worldly wisdom and finite reason to the mysteries of revelation, cannot be too strongly maintained; but if, in our eagerness to establish these truths, the real difference of cases be overlooked, not only will scripture be interpreted erroneously,

[4] Rom. xii. 2. James iv. 4. [5] Eph. ii. 12.

[6] Matt. x. 19.

but advantages renounced which are legitimately open to us, under a sounder view of the question.

The disciples, indeed, went forth as unlearned and uncultivated men, expressly selected to be miraculous advocates of a cause, which was to be shewn to be God's cause, partly by the very evidence of their own natural unfitness for such a commission. For similar reasons did St. Paul come to the Corinthians without the excellency of speech or of wisdom, with the express view of manifesting, that the success of his ministry was not owing to the adventitious aid of eloquence, or ordinary attainments; but that it was the special "testimony of God" to the truth of his preaching. In conformity therefore with this declared design, he calls them to witness, that his address "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."[7] But if these extraordinary gifts, which signalized the infancy of the primitive church, have ceased with the necessity and design in which they originated, it cannot be pretended that we are to dispense with labours for which no substitute is now provided; or to undervalue the importance of human learning, humbly dedicated

[7] 1 Cor. ii. 1—4.

to the service of christianity, and sanctified, through God's blessing, to the promotion of his cause and glory. The sound of the gospel must still go out into all lands; but the Spirit now gives utterance, not, as on the day of Pentecost, by conferring an immediate power of speaking in strange tongues, but by the secret influence of divine grace bestowed on natural means and ordinary opportunities of improvement.

IV. Again, the silence of our Lord respecting particular vices, might lead us to form very erroneous opinions respecting their criminality, did we not take into account certain peculiarities incidental to the time and place of his ministry.

No precept occupies so large a space in the Mosaic code as the law against idolatry. It is enacted in the most set and solemn terms; enforced with every argument which reverence or gratitude could suggest; repeated as often as obedience to it seems to have been relaxed by perversity or temptation; and guarded by the denunciation of penalties of the severest kind against those who despised its authority. Yet this fundamental law is scarcely noticed by our Lord, except perhaps by a quotation from Deu-

teronomy addressed to the tempter, and in one or two passages of a similar tendency.[8]

The commandment against sabbath-breaking is one, which, considered only with reference to its importance, it might have been expected Christ would have sanctioned by an express direction; especially when the great body of ceremonial rites of the Levitical law were about to be abolished on the establishment of the new system. Other circumstances make our Lord's will respecting the observance of the sabbath not doubtful; but the only instances where the evangelists record any remark on it from his own mouth, are his vindications of himself from supposed breaches of its sanctity, by affirming his right to dispense with it in certain cases, and condemning the bigotry, which would have hindered the performance of acts of mercy and love on the day of rest.[9]

The Israelites were forbidden to lend upon usury to their own countrymen, but permitted to lend to strangers.[1] The evangelists mention no law upon the subject; nor is there allusion to the practice, except incidentally in the parable

[8] Matt. iv. 10.

[9] Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 7—10; xiii. 10—16. John v. 16—18.

[1] Ex. xxii. 25. Deut. xxiii. 19, 20.

of the talents.[2] Other things, which are as much prohibited to a christian as to a Jew, find no place in the recorded discourses of our Lord, though the Jewish legislator has thought it necessary to express their unlawfulness by repeated declarations.

What conclusion, then, should we draw from the silence of our Lord on these topics? Are we to conceive that idolatry and sabbath-breaking and other violations of the law are less offensive to God, who hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, than to God, who in the old time spoke by the mouth of his servant Moses? or, as he formerly suffered some things to remain, in consequence of the hardness of heart of the Israelites, has he now adopted the same course, with regard to much weightier matters, under a far more spiritual law?

There is, in fact, no difficulty in assigning a reason for the omission, without having recourse to such suppositions, and we may derive from it an useful lesson. If Christ had seen that the direction which the wickedness of the times had taken, were such as to have required it, there can be no doubt that he would have left on record as strong denunciations against faults which he passed over without notice, as the gospels actually contain against hypocrisy, and unbelief,

[2] Matt. xxv. 27.

and the other corruptions of the law, which prevailed at his advent. It was not his purpose to lay down a new penal code, so much as to reform the abuses of the old; he came to fulfil the commandments of the law, rather than to supersede them formally by another table. He did not think it necessary to specify every vice, any more than to give a catalogue of every virtue;[3] but shewed generally, with respect to the one, that the tree must be made good, before good fruits would be produced; and with respect to the other, that the seat of depravity must be purified, for out of the heart proceed all evil things. The distinction, therefore, should be clearly marked between our Lord as a preacher of doctrine, and as a moralist. As a preacher of doctrine, the truths he taught were everlasting, and in due

[3] "It has been objected that in the precepts of the New Testament many splendid virtues, acknowledged by the heathen moralists, have been omitted. Patriotism, friendship, bravery, &c. have been specified. To which we reply, that so far as patriotism and friendship are moral virtues, they are included in the general precepts of the gospel, which require us to love our fellow-men, and to do them good; and in those which command us to think of "whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;" but when the love of country, and the attachment to a friend interfere with the general obligations of loving all men, they are no longer virtues, but vices."—*Alexander's Brief Outline of the Evidences of the Christian Religion.*

season all the ends of the world will hear the same terms of the same covenant proposed, without one jot or tittle of alteration or omission. They are the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. But as a moralist he addressed himself to the particular crimes in which his hearers most stood in need of correction; leaving an example to succeeding teachers to copy his discrimination; and to supply by reasoning from analogy the want of positive precept, as often as offences arise in the church which require exposure or suppression.

At the same time it must be acknowledged, that there is perhaps nothing which shews more unequivocally the heavenly wisdom of our Saviour's ministry, than the universal application of which his preaching admits. Its very fitness for the cases of ourselves and of our children, as well as of our fathers through endless generations, has always, and with reason, been appealed to as one of the strongest internal evidences of its truth. He is not the prophet of a limited district, or of a particular period; of one state of society, or of one form of civil government; but of the whole world and of all ages, of every social and of every political community. With very few and unimportant exceptions, his discourses are not calculated for the meridian of Palestine alone, but for all countries under hea-

ven, wherever in progress of time the feet of the messengers of good tidings shall arrive. There is nothing in them intended to gratify private curiosity, or to encourage frivolous and unedifying speculation. There is nothing provided exclusively for any separate class, or a more distinguished order of hearers. All is of obvious and of general utility. All is as applicable to the multitude in future generations, as it was to the mixed concourse of people who composed his audience in the plains of Judea. As he had declared in the commencement of his ministry, that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach the gospel "to the poor,"[4] and had subsequently charged his disciples to go into all the world, and preach the gospel "to every creature;"[5] he became himself the first example of a teacher, with whom was no respect of persons, and whose doctrines related indiscriminately to the interests and improvement of the whole race of mankind.

[4] Luke iv. 18. [5] Luke xvi. 15.

CHAPTER V.

The gradual Teaching of Christ.

It appears to have been the practice of St. Paul, when instructing the primitive converts, to make large use of a certain discretionary power, in gradually unfolding the higher mysteries of the gospel to the recently associated members of the churches. He writes to the Corinthians—"We speak wisdom among them that are perfect;"[1]

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 6. Τοῦς τελειοῦς in opposition to the catechumens. Comp. Heb. v. 12—14, Gr. The distinction maintained in the primitive church between these two orders deserves to be remarked in connexion with my present subject. "The *Fideles* had their peculiar privileges in the church, above the catechumens. For, first, it was their sole prerogative to partake of the Lord's table, and communicate with one another in the symbols of Christ's body and blood at the altar . . . . . Another of their prerogatives above catechumens, was to stay and join with the ministers in all the prayers of the church, which the catechumens were not allowed to do . . . . . More particularly the use of the Lord's prayer was the sole prerogative of the πιστοὶ, or believers; for then it was no crime, or argument of weakness, or want of the

those who were so far advanced in elementary knowledge, and so well matured in judgment

Spirit, to use it; but an honour and privilege of the most consummate and perfect christians. The catechumens were not allowed to say, 'Our Father,' till they had first made themselves sons by regeneration in the waters of baptism. This is expressly said by St. Chrysostom, St. Austin, Theodoret, and several others; and for this reason Chrysostom calls it, εὐχὴ πιστῶν; and St. Austin, *Oratio Fidelium*, the prayer of the regenerate or believers, because it was their privilege and birthright. . . . . Lastly, they were admitted to be auditors of all discourses made in the church, even those that treated of the most abstruse points and profound mysteries of the christian religion; which the catechumens were strictly prohibited from hearing. The catechumens were allowed to hear the scriptures, and the ordinary popular discourses that were made upon them; which was no more than what some councils allow even to Jews and Gentiles: for in those discourses they never treated plainly of their mysteries, but in such a covert way that the catechumens could not understand them. But when the catechumens were dismissed, then they discoursed more openly of their mysteries before the *Fideles*, whose privilege it was to be the sole auditors of such discourses. This we learn from St. Ambrose, who says, his common discourses to the unbaptized were only on points of morality; but when they were baptized, then was the time to open to them the mysteries and sacraments of religion; to have discoursed to them of those things before, had been more like exposing mysteries than explaining them. St. Austin speaks to the same purpose in one of his sermons to the newly-baptized," &c. &c.—*Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian Church*, book I. c. iv. sect. 5—8. Suicer (in voce κατηχούμενοι) speaks of two classes of catechumens; the one more advanced

and spirituality, as to be proper recipients of the deep things contained in heavenly wisdom. In another place he thus answers those, who complained of his refraining from the abstruse subjects which formed the principal topics of the ministrations of the false teachers—"I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able."[2] Again,—"Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."[3] And when he went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, on the subject of the exemption of the Jews

than the other. These distinctions were carried to an excess in the early church which led to great and dangerous errors. The Montanists and Valentinians laid claim to the knowledge of doctrines, for which the world was not ripe at the first promulgation of the gospel, and of which even the apostles themselves were ignorant. Nor were these notions confined to these extravagant pretenders to revelation. "The principal object of the Stromata of Clemens Alexandrinus is to point out the distinction between the christian, who is perfected in knowledge, (γνωστικὸς,) and the great mass of believers; and to lay down rules for the formation of this perfect character." —*Bp. Kaye's Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, chap. i.

[2] 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. [3] Heb. v. 14.

from observance of the Mosaic ordinances, he communicated his view of the gospel "privately to them which were of reputation," that no cavil might be raised against it in the church at large.[4]

In all these instances such a method of teaching is clearly implied, as would have respect to the gradual advancement of the believers in spiritual knowledge; so that the apostle gave here a little, and there a little, not displaying all the truths he knew to those, to whom they would have been foolishness at that stage of their experience in religion.[5]

Now, the question is, how far St. Paul was justified in this mode of exercising his ministry by the example of our Saviour.

If the argument from analogy be taken into consideration, it will afford a strong authority in favour of the apostle's practice. From the time of the first promise of a redeemer, given immediately after the fall, when it was simply declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, a series of consistent but totally unconnected prophecies, successively and by degrees unfolded the particular tribe, the family, the individual house, whence the Messiah should spring—the time and place of his birth—

[4] Gal. ii. 2.

[5] See *Thruston's Twelve Discourses*, p. 12—14.

the minutest circumstances of his life—the scope of his mission—the qualifications with which he should be endowed for sustaining his mediatorial office.[6]

In consequence of these several revelations, which were all understood to point clearly at a certain specified character about to arise at a definite season, a general expectation of the advent of some great prophetic teacher was excited among the Jews, which had a tendency to prepare their minds for the proper reception of the truths he would be commissioned to deliver. Accordingly we find that little more than a century and a half before our Lord's birth, they pulled down an altar which the heathen had profaned, and "laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them."[7] And at a subse-

[6] "The Old Testament light shone gradually to the perfect day; and it is good to observe how at sundry times, and in divers manners, (subsequent predictions improving and giving light to the preceding ones,) God spake to the fathers concerning his Son, by whom he has now spoken to us."—*Henry* on Luke xxiv. 27. See an interesting treatise by the Rev. Allen Cooper, entitled, *The gradual Developement of the Office, Titles, and Character of Christ in the Prophets*, &c., in which the author has ably and usefully illustrated a view suggested by Mr. Benson, in his *Hulsean Lectures* for 1820, p. 164.

[7] 1 Maccab. iv. 46.

quent period in the history, when the high priesthood was conferred on Simon and his posterity after him, a very remarkable reservation was made, with evident reference to the prevailing expectation of a heavenly teacher. "The Jews and priests were well pleased, that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet."[8] It was in allusion to this universal belief, that when our Lord began to display the powers with which he was invested, the people said, "that a great prophet had risen up among them, and that God had visited his people."[9]

Nor was this all. When the season for Christ's appearance had arrived, a harbinger was expressly sent to prepare the way before him; and to declare, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; through whose ministry a great and general attention to religion was awakened previously to the commencement of the labours of his divine master. "The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not."[1] His baptism with water preceded the baptism with fire and the Holy Ghost. St. Paul, addressing the Jews of Antioch, lays an important stress on the preparatory commission of John; as if it had

[8] 1 Maccab. xiv. 41. Bef. C. 143.

[9] Luke vii. 16.

[1] Luke iii. 15.

been among the decrees of God, that the sun of righteousness could not arise, till his messenger had testified concerning the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. "God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour Jesus, when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel."[2] Nor was it till John's personal ministry had been altogether brought to an end, that our Lord's began. The conversation with Nicodemus, which took place previously, being private and by night, had probably not transpired; and the public events of Christ's life, since his baptism, had hitherto been confined to the call of three or four disciples, the miracle at Cana, the purgation of the temple, and baptizing in Judæa, by the ministry of his disciples.[3] These may be considered as introductory steps to his mission, calculated to excite attention, and keep the eyes of his countrymen upon his proceedings. But the evangelist tells us that "when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;" and he presently adds, "From that time Jesus began to preach."[4] So insensibly did the

[2] Acts xiii. 23, 24.

[3] John i. 39, 42—46; ii. 2, 15; iii. 22, compared with iv. 2.

[4] Matt. iv. 12. 18.

Lord, who prepared room of old for his vine out of Egypt, make way for his spiritual vine, and cause it to take deep root, and fill the land.[5]

The gradual manner, in which the eyes of the world were thus directed to Christ before his actual appearance upon the scene of his ministry, would lead us to expect, that, in the exercise of his functions as a teacher of righteousness, a similar method would be adopted by himself, when the fulness of time had arrived for his mission. The question then is, whether, in point of fact, our Lord's manner of teaching was founded on this progressive system. Did he bring forth milk as unto babes first, before he could dispense meat as unto perfect men?

In the sixth chapter of the Apostolical Constitutions the following observation occurs:— "For doubtless our Lord and teacher Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began first to do, and then to teach—as Luke says (Acts i. 1), 'The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.' For the same reason Christ says himself (Matt. v. 19), 'whosoever shall do and teach' these commandments, 'the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'"[6]

[5] Ps. lxxx. 8, 9.

[6] Καὶ γὰρ ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν καὶ διδάσκαλος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἤρξατο πρῶτον ποιεῖν, καὶ τότε διδάσκειν· ὡς που

This passage is an instance of the injudicious manner, in which the early theological writers sometimes connect texts with subjects to which they have little or doubtful application. It would be idle to suppose, that any inference can be safely drawn solely from the position of words in one or two sentences of scripture; and all conclusions built on such a foundation must be worse than unsatisfactory. It is one of the excellencies of the wisdom given from above, that the canonical books are free from all faults of this kind; though as soon as we look into the best works of uninspired writers, even of the primitive ages, frequent instances occur of this want of judgment.

Without having recourse, therefore, to what is so little impressive, as, even if admitted, to carry with it scarcely any weight, I proceed to inquire whether there are not other considerations, which will set the gradual order of our Saviour's teaching in a clearer light.

I. There was a progressive order, first, in the disclosure of the new dispensation to the nations. The divine decrees required that the gospel should not be offered at its first promulgation to the

λέγει ὁ Λουκᾶς· Ὧν ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν. Δίο φησιν· ὃς δ' ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ.—*Constit. Apost.* lib. ii. cap. 6.

Gentiles. Though intended to be "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," yet it was ordained that it was to be "to the Jew first."[7] The apostles, therefore, were forbidden at their first mission to go amongst any but those of the house of Israel. "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[8]

Hence, when some Greeks at the last passover came to Philip, desiring him to use his influence to procure them an interview with Jesus, he first consults with Andrew, apparently through a doubt, whether it would be proper to bring uncircumcised persons into the presence of their master, after the inhibition he had formerly given them. Jesus then thought proper to declare, that if he were lifted up from the earth, he would

[7] Rom. i. 16.

[8] Matt. x. 5, 6. Erasmus remarks that the promulgation of the gospel among the nations, even after the resurrection, was intended to be progressive. "Quin et post resurrectionem, ita mandavit evangelii gratiam dispensandam, ut primum pr dicarent Hierosolymæ, deinde in Samaria, tandem inter gentes usque ad extrema terræ."—*Ecclesiastes.* A determinate order was to be observed; first, the gospel was to be made known in Jerusalem and Judea, where, according to the prediction, the covenant should be confirmed with many for one week, Dan. ix. 27; secondly, among the Samaritans; and lastly, among Gentiles in general. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts i. 8. See *Gresswell, Dissertation* xiii. *on the Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.*

draw all men unto him.[9] The time was at hand when there would be no difference between the Jew and the Greek, but the same Lord would be rich unto all that call upon him, and all would be one in Christ Jesus. And as it would facilitate the future preaching of the apostles among their Gentile hearers, that some preliminary tidings of the dawn of the sun of righteousness should be carried to those who were then sitting in darkness, it appears probable that the discourse of our Lord to which this incident gave occasion, was delivered, either as the strangers were approaching, or actually in their presence. This would give them opportunity for improving the hint of the gracious intention of the redeemer of Abraham's seed in their favour. They would be telling something of the good news of salvation in their own land; and some eyes would perhaps be looking towards the east, in patient expectation of him, who was to prove not only the "consolation of Israel," but of the heathen world. Our Lord, therefore, seems to have viewed their application to be admitted into his presence, as an earnest of the flowing-in of all the Gentiles to him—"The hour is come," said he, "that the Son of man should be glorified." If his hearers made a suitable use of this announcement, they would be instrumental, on

[9] John xii. 20—32.

their return home, in disposing the hearts of their countrymen to receive the saving truths, which the messengers of the gospel would shortly propose to their acceptance. In the Acts of the apostles and in the epistles, the Greeks are frequently mentioned by name among the heathen converts, as having embraced the proffered mercy of God.[1] The Grecian widows are early mentioned as among those believers who received support from the common stock.[2] Titus was a Greek; and Timothy himself, one of the most active agents in the promulgation of christianity, was likewise a Greek by the father's side.[3] It is also particularly recorded, that, at Iconium and Thessalonica, there were among the number of the believers "of the devout Greeks a great multitude;" and at Berea, "of honourable women which were Greeks . . . . not a few."[4]

The case of the Syrophenician woman's daughter would be likely to have the effect of causing similar preparation in another quarter. She would be a living instance that, though God had decreed the children should first be filled, yet the dogs under the table would not only be admitted, in their turn, to eat the children's crumbs; but would enjoy eventually free access

[1] Acts xiv. 1; xviii. 4; xix. 17.
[2] Acts vi. 1.
[3] Gal. ii. 3. Acts xvi. 1.
[4] Acts xvii. 4. 12.

to that supper, which the original guests had refused to taste.[5] Antioch, which has the honour of being the place where the disciples were first called christians, was a city of the country to which this woman belonged; and the news she would carry of her benefactor, might perhaps have been providentially designed to contribute to the subsequent success of Paul and Barnabas in that place.[6]

We find, indeed, that an immediate effect followed our Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria, for we are told that "many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman."[7] But this was only the seed of a future and more abundant harvest. Not long after our Lord's ascension, Philip came preaching the word in the same city with such acceptance, that "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which he spake."[8]

Nor did Christ disdain to employ missionaries, who were sent before his face to make ready, as it were, for his own teaching. The seventy were sent "into every city and place whither he himself would come;" doubtless for the purpose of exciting the attention of the people, and preparing their hearts for a serious reception

[5] Mark vii. 27.
[6] Acts xi. 19—26.
[7] John iv. 39.
[8] Acts viii. 6.

of the word at his personal visit.[9] The twelve were also employed on a similar mission, and gifted with miraculous powers, to the intent that they should open a way for their Master.[1] Capernaum, which there are good grounds for believing was the place of our Lord's stated abode during his ministry, was in a measure prepared for his residence by the miracle wrought on the nobleman's son, who dwelt there.[2] One whom Christ had dispossessed of unclean spirits, desired leave to accompany him, that he might continue to enjoy the benefit of his instructions. But our Lord had other views in the transaction, and intended to make him useful in procuring for himself and his disciples a favourable reception among those very neighbours to whom the demoniac in his former state had been a terror or a temptation. "Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Instead of sending him away with his customary injunction to "tell no man," he expressly commissions him to magnify the glory of his cure, and to declare abroad among his pagan brethren the mercies he had received. We read accordingly, that when he began to publish in Deca-

[9] Luke x. 1.

[1] Matt. x. 1—8, compared with xi. 1.

[2] John iv. 46.

polis what had befallen him, "all men did marvel."[3] More than a year seems to have elapsed before our Lord went himself into those parts; but his messenger had been so diligent in making known his fame, that the people were disposed to regard him with reverence and expectation; and no sooner had he entered their territory, than they brought unto him another object of compassion, remembering his former miracle, and in hope of witnessing a second display of his power.[4]

In the same manner our Saviour reaped the fruit of John's ministry long after his forerunner's death. When he withdrew beyond Jordan into the principal scene of John's labours to escape from the malevolence of the Jews, the inhabitants, who remembered the Baptist's testimony, and observed, that "all things that he spake of this man were true," improved the season of our Lord's stay among them to such good effect, that "many believed on him there."[5] Thus did the seed, though long buried, spring up; and the faithful preacher of repentance, though dead, yet spoke for the honour of his Master, and the gathering unto him of such as should be saved.

It seems to have been with the view of se-

[3] Mark v. 19, 20. Townson gives satisfactory reasons for supposing that this demoniac was a pagan —Disc. v. sect. 3.

[4] Mark vii. 31.

[5] John x. 40—42.

curing the same advantage, that Christ was in the habit of returning again, from time to time, to the places where some of his principal miracles were wrought, or his most important discourses delivered, as if to see what improvement had followed, and whether the promise of harvest were answerable to the seed sown. Frequent notices of this habit appear in the narratives of the evangelists. "Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine." "Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead."[6]

A circumstance is recorded by St. Matthew, which, at first sight, appears at variance with our Lord's usual readiness to teach, but may be explained by considering it in connexion with the present subject.

The evangelist says, that when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side of the sea of Tiberias.[7] On other occasions, when a more than ordinary desire to hear him was evinced, he continued, without regard to his own fatigue, and preached the word without intermission. Why then did our Lord depart from his custom in this instance, when it might have been imagined he would have availed himself of the numbers, who were gathered together, to spread

[6] John iv. 46; xii. 1. [7] Matt. viii. 18.

the knowledge of his kingdom? The most reasonable way of accounting for this singularity is to suppose, that however promising to human judgment such an opening might have appeared, there were circumstances which Jesus saw would render it unfavourable; he had probably taught as much as his hearers could then receive and digest; or they were indisposed to profit by his further instructions; and thus the benefit they might derive from a more gradual delivery of the truth, would have been lessened or prevented altogether, had he proceeded at that time to lengthen his discourse.

Perhaps too we might have thought it would have been his frequent practice to have joined, when in the midst of his disciples, in one common and united prayer to his heavenly Father. Yet, during all the earlier period of his ministry,[8] we find no record of any such custom—no intimation, that he thought them yet ripe for bearing part with him in so solemn and intimate a communion with God as such a fellowship in religious worship would have presupposed. We may infer, indeed, that the disciples were with him on an occasion related by St. Luke—"It came to pass, that as he was praying in a certain place, *when he ceased*, one of his dis-

[8] Perhaps Luke ix. 18. should be excepted; but the expression is ambiguous.

ciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."[9] But this occurrence took place in the third year after his baptism; and even then it appears that the request to be taught how to address the throne of grace proceeded from the disciples themselves. Nor is there, strictly speaking, any thing in the prayer itself, with the exception of that clause in the fifth petition, "as we forgive our debtors," to which the Jews had not been accustomed, in substance, in their own devotions. There were with him in the garden of Gethsemane only three witnesses of his agony, yet he three times left them at a little distance while he went away farther, and prayed alone, that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from him.[1] At another time he constrained his disciples to put to sea without him, "and went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone."[2] So too when Peter was to be sifted as wheat, he was not taught to pray himself for grace, or to join in prayer with his Master that he might be supported in the hour of temptation, but it was Christ who prayed for him by a vicarious intercession.[3]

When, however, our Lord was on the point of leaving the world, and was about to utter his

[9] Luke xi. 1.
[1] Matt. xxvi. 36.
[2] Matt. xiv. 22, 23.
[3] Luke xxii. 31.

last earthly prayer, he no longer retired by himself to hold solitary intercourse with the Father. He then raised his voice to heaven in the presence of his followers, and permitted them to hear him openly making intercession for them.[4] Jesus knew that, as his hour was at hand, it was time that they should partake more largely of the spirit of grace. They were gradually ripening into meet witnesses of his resurrection, and preachers of his kingdom. They were adding day by day to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, for the work of the ministry, and the edification of their fellow-believers in Christ. But the steps, by which they rose to this pre-eminence in heavenly wisdom, were so progressive as to afford us some insight into the scheme of the divine teacher. Like the man, whose sight was gradually restored till his eyes were able to bear the full light of day, when he, who at first saw "men as trees walking," was finally enabled to distinguish "every man clearly;"[5] so the vail, which obscured the understanding of our Lord's companions, was lifted up by degrees, and their discernment rendered imperceptibly more spiritual, till at last they became mighty teachers of the mystery of godliness, in all its purity and power.

In the whole of this considerate management,

[4] John xvii. [5] Mark viii. 24.

(if such a term may be applied without impropriety to that consummate tenderness which bore so patiently with the natural weakness of the disciples,) in the condescension, with which their low conceptions were elevated, and their indistinct notions cleared—in the measured pace, by which all the process of illumination was conducted, and precept added to precept, in proportion as former doctrines had been comprehended and digested, we recognize a familiar feature in the predicted character of the good shepherd, of whom it was foretold, that he should "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead those who were with young."[6]

We see also a specimen of the wonderful excellence of heavenly wisdom. Man is often precipitate in the conduct of his best measures, and frequently obstructs, by his inexpedient rashness, the success of his projects. But the example of our Saviour throws a steady light on the path of duty for those who are charged with the care of winning souls to Christ. In his own personal teaching he condescended to proportion his revelations to the infirmities of the human mind; bringing out of the storehouse of divine truth "things new and old," as each were needful, and giving to every man his meat in due season. And now, in his state of exaltation,

[6] Isaiah xl. 11.

the babe and the perfect man are both cared for by him; and provision is made for their several wants with as much personality of application, as if each individual were the sole object of his providence, and the single recipient of his favour. There is no one, whose own particular experience cannot enable him to testify that known unto God are all his works from the beginning, and his hand is over all of them.

II. I proceed to examine whether the argument acquires any additional force from the subjects themselves of our Lord's discourses—that is to say, whether there was such a difference between the topics brought forward during the first and last years of his ministry, as would indicate an intentional progress from elementary truths to the higher mysteries of the gospel.

Some such gradual developement of heavenly knowledge is probably observable in the course of every pious human minister. As the germ of religious feeling expands within him, it has a corresponding effect upon the tenor of his ministry; and as it is not in the nature of christianity to be stationary in its acquirements, an enlargement of views, a greater warmth of affections, a more fervent faith, a deeper sense of the guilt and danger of sin, an increased acquaintance with the heart of man, obtained by long and

patient experience in the school of Christ, all tend to give a gravity and strength to his later efforts in the cause of his Master, which could not have been expected at an earlier stage of his labours.

In such a case, the change is owing to the progress of a mind under the influence of grace; and we admire the effects of that holy principle which, like a little leaven, gradually leavens the whole lump, and is able to bring to maturity and usefulness what had its origin in a day of small things. But with regard to Christ, there is no reason to suppose, that he was filled with a larger measure of the Holy Spirit at the end, than at the commencement of his ministry; or that he was less under the influence of its teaching, when it descended visibly on him from heaven at his baptism, than when he complained in his last hour of the desertion of his Father, and the temporary withdrawing of spiritual support.[7] He and his Father were one from the beginning, and from the beginning also he spoke not of himself, but the Father which sent him, he gave him a commandment, what he should say, and what he should speak.[8]

We cannot doubt, therefore, that it was in conformity with the will of his heavenly Father, that, speaking generally, the language used by

[7] Matt. iii. 16; xxvii. 46. [8] John xii. 49.

Christ in the commencement of his ministry should have been so much more easy to be comprehended than that which he held at the close of his course—or, what is the same thing, that so much difference should exist between the elementary character of the sermon on the mount, and the deeper doctrines divulged in the last chapters of St. John.

Not, however, that our Lord ever put forward any of the great truths of the gospel in a modified manner. Our divine Master might lead on his disciples gently from doctrine to doctrine; but he could not mitigate or adulterate those doctrines, to render them more palatable to the taste of his hearers, and less offensive to human corruption and pride. The attempt, indeed, if it could have been made with propriety, would have been unavailing. It is impossible thus to slope, as it were, the ascent to heavenly knowledge, no preparation would of itself reconcile the natural man to the humbling doctrines of the gospel. Flesh and blood could not embrace them, under any disguise. They would be as distasteful at last as at first. The heart loathes them, however veiled, until grace procures admittance for them, and until the things of God are known and distinguished to be of God by spiritual discernment given from above. And so, in point of fact, we find Christ, at the earliest

periods of his ministry occasionally disclosing himself in the most explicit manner. At the first passover, he assumed a right over his Father's house, by cleansing the temple—a declaration of the divine prerogative of the strongest kind.[9] At the same period he wrought miracles openly, and foretold his death and resurrection more plainly than at any other time, until the last year of his ministry.[1] The blessings at the opening of the sermon on the mount itself, contain very high doctrines.[2] His discourse with Nicodemus brings forward the doctrine of regeneration —the deepest theological truth.[3] His conversation with the woman of Samaria revealed that "God is a spirit"—the most abstract metaphysical truth.[4] In declaring to the people of Nazareth that to none of the widows in Israel was Elias sent, "save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow," he taught the doctrine of election—the most mysterious of the divine purposes.[5]

[9] John ii. 13—17.

[1] See *Greswell's Dissertations on an Harmony of the Gospels*, Diss. viii. vol. i. 296 297.

[2] "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—"they that mourn"—"they which are persecuted for righteousness sake," &c.—Matt. v. 3—12.

[3] John iii. 3. [4] John v. 24.

[5] Luke iv. 25, 26. The Baptist himself, on seeing Jesus coming to him, broke out into the high doctrine of the vicarious

It is certain, therefore, that the gradual teaching of Christ did not consist in his preaching a modified gospel in the first instance, to be succeeded afterwards, when the opportunity seemed more favourable, by a purer and severer view of christian doctrine. The gospel which our Lord preached was essentially the gospel in all its integrity and simplicity from the very first. But in the gospel there are "elements," as well as "hidden wisdom;" and it will not be difficult to shew, that it was to the elements of christian truth that our Lord generally saw fit to direct his hearers, rather than to the "deep things of God," which are the food of "them that are perfect."[6]

atonement, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John i. 29. So too St. Paul, "I delivered unto you *first of all* that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures," 1 Cor. xv. 3.. Melancthon commences his "Common Places" with the highest predestinarian doctrine. "He then supposes an objection to be made to his beginning with so harsh and difficult a doctrine; but he answers, 'It matters little whether that, which must affect every part of our discussion, occupies the first place or the last in our compendium.'"—*Scott's Continuation of Milner's Church History*, vol. ii. 192.

[6] 1 Cor. ii. 6. 10. "The Lord Jesus professedly withheld the full manifestations of his doctrines until the period subsequent to his death and resurrection, when the instruments of communication were to be his inspired messengers." And again—

From the prevailing topic of the discourses of the Baptist, he has obtained the title of the preacher of repentance. Now, it is remarkable, that the doctrine with which our Lord commenced his public teaching, was precisely the same which his forerunner had previously declared. He who had been in the bosom of the Father from the beginning, and was privy to all the secret purposes and gracious intentions of divine love, might have declared the secrets of the upper heaven, or of the deep below, and have revealed mysteries which the wisdom of man, in its sublimest conceptions, could never have fathomed. But his first preaching was no

"It was of the very genius and character of his ministry, that by it the peculiar doctrines of the christian dispensation should not be fully unfolded. That complete manifestation was reserved for the ministration of the Spirit, who was to take of the things of Christ, and shew them to the apostles, and to glorify him by leading them into all truth. Jesus himself seems to have plainly insisted, in his own teachings, upon no doctrines but those which were generally admitted by his countrymen as resting on the authority of Moses and the prophets; other truths, though deducible from the old testament by consequences less obvious or less generally recognized, he taught by allusions, assumptions, parables, and implications; or sometimes by a direct, but abrupt and insulated assertion, the import of which would become the more apparent by being afterwards reflected upon."—*Dr. Pye Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, b. iii. ch. iii.

other than the repetition of John's word—"Repent;" and the constraining argument with which he enforced it was the same—"the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[7] This was a simple exhortation well suited to the dawning of the new dispensation; but afterwards the apostle expressly calls on the Hebrews to "leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works."[8] What, therefore, our Lord in his wisdom thought fit for the subject of an elementary discourse, the apostle, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, judged unseasonable for the edification of those who had arrived at a more advanced stage in the christian life.[9]

[7] Matt. iv. 17. [8] Heb. vi. 1.

[9] "The teachers, who undertook to prepare the catechumens for reception at the baptismal font, appear to have pursued the course pointed out by the Baptist, and by our blessed Lord. They began by insisting on the necessity of repentance and amendment of life." . . . . "While the teacher was endeavouring to impress upon the catechumen the necessity of repentance and amendment of life, he would at the same time gradually unfold the great truths which constitute the objects of a christian faith; suiting his instructions to the comprehension and previous acquirements of the proselyte, and proceeding from the simpler to the more sublime and mysterious doctrines of the gospel."—*Bishop Kaye's Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, chap. iv.

During the earlier periods of Christ's ministry he does not enter with his disciples on the topic of his sufferings. Hints were given, which were not understood till afterwards, as—"Destroy this temple"—"The son of man must be lifted up"—"The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."[1] But he reserved the fuller notices of his intended sacrifice, till, the day when he should be offered being near at hand,[2] the knowledge they had attained of his character and office would render them in some degree more ripe for the communication. If, even then, Peter was so little prepared for such an event as to rebuke his master for uttering this hard saying, a more premature revelation would have doubtless spread dismay among the whole band of disciples. They would have walked no more with one whose earthly career was to be terminated in a manner so much at variance with their hopes and expectations. They trusted that it was he who should redeem their nation from its temporal yoke; and would have fled from his standard, had he professed from the very outset to lead them only to

[1] John ii. 19; iii. 14; vi. 51.

[2] The earliest intimation occurs Matt. xvi. 21, a few months only before his crucifixion. "He reserves the doctrine of his sufferings until the one-half of his ministry is expired."—*Bp. Wilson's Evidences*, lect. xvii.

that mount of Calvary which was to be the scene of his bitterest humiliation, and of his enemies' apparent triumph. They would have been scattered, like sheep upon the mountains, at the first hearing of the shame of the cross.[3]

Again; the principal object of the first recorded public sermon delivered by Christ, was to clear away prejudices, and correct errors, prevailing to a great extent among the people, and presenting a bar to his reception as the true Messiah. Accordingly, we do not find him insisting upon the necessity of a propitiation for sin, or declaring the spiritual benefits which would be derived from his death. These were truths which, though not wholly unmentioned by himself, were left to be unfolded minutely by the apostles at a future period, when the Spirit of truth, according to the promise, should receive of Christ's, and shew it unto them.[4] In the mean time he opens his own ministry by dwelling on the nature of his kingdom—the blessings connected with christian virtues—the exposition of the moral law—the recommendation of particular duties—and the necessity of a practical regard to the divine precepts. These are all elementary subjects well suited to prepare the mind, and

[3] Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 22, 23; xx. 19, 20. Luke xxii. 22 24.

[4] John xvi. 13—15.

bring it into a fit state and temper for the announcement of the great mysteries of godliness, and the revelation of those higher matters, into which the very angels who stand around the eternal throne desire to look.[5] But after the last supper our Lord dwells on truths of very different import, requiring to be approached with that prostration of the understanding, which, (however unwelcome the phrase may sound in the ears of modern infidelity or pride,) is the only disposition that can rightly enter into the spirit of christianity, or adequately comprehend the nature of its doctrines. Of this kind are the views of future happiness, displayed for the comfort of the disciples before those dangers began, to which the remainder of their lives would be exposed—the assurances of his own gracious, though invisible presence—the promise of the Comforter assisting and abiding with them—the mystery of God in man, and of man in God —and, what was more extraordinary still, the fellowship of the believer with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.[6]

It was at the same time that our Lord first openly declared, that men were henceforth to approach the mercy-seat of God, through himself as their great high priest. He then taught them that the way into the holiest would be thrown

[5] 1 Pet. i. 12 [6] John xiv—xvii.

open, and that they would no longer have to plead before the God of Abraham the promises and covenant which had hitherto been the foundation of their hopes. Henceforth they would have access by faith unto him through "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the things of the people."[7] He assured them of this truth, with his usual strong affirmation in things of high importance. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."[8] These are communications of such sublime and marvellous tendency, that there was a peculiar fitness in reserving them for the last and most intimate discovery of the divine decrees; when the truth of their promulgator was about to be sealed by the miracle of his resurrection, and he was shortly to ascend visibly before their eyes as their victorious forerunner into the kingdom of his glory.

And yet high and important as these subjects were, and much as they exceeded any former

[7] Heb. ii. 17. See Rom. viii. 32—34. Eph. ii. 14—18. Col. iii. 16, 17. Heb. iv. 14—16; vii. 23—25; x. 19—22; xiii. 15, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 4—6. 1 John ii. 1, 2.

[8] John xvi. 23, 24.

revelation which the disciples had heard, there were still other points connected with the christian dispensation in which it was necessary for them to be fully instructed, although they were not yet in a state to receive them. There were remaining prejudices to be subdued, and false conceptions to be removed, before they could listen without offence to certain doctrines which it was requisite they should know, in order that they might be duly qualified for the work to which they were called. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."[6] The things alluded to were such, probably, as the abrogation of the ceremonial law—the doctrine of justification by faith—the rejection of the Jews—the calling of the Gentiles—subjects not comprehended by the disciples, notwithstanding the several declarations, more or less explicit, uttered by our Lord in the course of his ministry,[1] until the full effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost had verified Christ's words, that, when he was gone away, the Father would send the Comforter, who would teach them all things.[2]

[6] John xvi. 12, 13.

[1] Matt. viii. 11; xxi. 41—43; xxii. 1—14.

[2] John xiv. 26.

As to the abolition of the Mosaic law, it was only hinted at by our Lord, during his life time, in an obscure and reserved manner. He left it to be gathered as an inference from his prediction concerning the destruction of the temple; or from his declaration to the Samaritan woman, that the hour was coming when the true worshippers should worship the Father neither on mount Gerizim nor at Jerusalem.[3] Couple this assurance with his saying to his disciples, that, where two or three were gathered together in his name, there would he be in the midst of them,[4] and it certainly amounts to an indication of the approaching repeal of the peculiarities of that system, which required that every male should present himself three times annually at a particular place exclusively appropriated for the worship of God.

But how differently does St. Paul declare the same truth. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse

[3] John ii. 19; iv. 21. [4] Matt. xviii. 20.

for us." "Wherefore then serveth the law? it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain."[5]

Here all is plain, and positive, and unreserved; it is expressly affirmed, that the ceremonies of the Mosaic law were superseded; the authority of the new dispensation is distinctly vindicated; and the least semblance of apostasy to Judaism is severely condemned and forbidden.

With regard to the great doctrine of justification by faith, not infrequent allusions to it will be found throughout the gospels. The subject was to form a part of John's preparation before the face of the Messiah;[6] and the Baptist is more than once recorded as bearing explicit testimony to Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, and the sole source of everlasting life.[7] Our Lord

[5] Gal. ii. 15, 16; iii. 13. 19. 24, 25; iv. 9—11.

[6] Luke i. 77, 78. [7] John i. 29; iii. 36.

himself touches upon the doctrine, on several occasions, in his private conversations with the disciples;[8] and sometimes, though less often, even in his public discourses;[9] but his expressions are for the most part brief and figurative, and unaccompanied by explanation or comment. Yet, that the great object, for which he was to undergo the death of the cross, was not so clearly revealed during his lifetime as to be understood even by his own disciples, is manifest from his conversation with two of them after his resurrection—"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"[1] And it was his last care, immediately before the ascension, to enter with the eleven into the full explanation of his expiatory sacrifice, referring to his former discourses, and interpreting their meaning; that the apostles might be competent expounders of this important doctrine.[2]

Accordingly, when the language of the epistles is compared with that of the gospels on this point, it will be impossible not to see that the disciple had received his commission to set forth,

[8] Matt. xx. 28; xxvi. 28. John iii. 14, 15; x. 11; xi. 25; xv. 13.

[9] John v. 24; vi. 29. 47. 51.

[1] Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

[2] Luke xxiv. 44—47.

if not in clearer, at least in fuller terms, the meaning of his Lord. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."[3] Nay, the apostle himself seems to admit, in a passage where he perhaps alludes to an expression used by our Saviour, that for a season this truth was not fully promulgated. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."[4]

On the subject of the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, it may be thought that Christ was more explicit. We certainly find the germ of each doctrine contained in his discourses, but the doctrines themselves are suf-

[3] Rom. iii. 23, 24. Eph. i. 7.

[4] 1 Tim. ii. 6, compared with Matt. xx. 28. The Vulgate thus expresses it—"Cujus testimonium *temporibus suis* confirmatum est"—"of which the testimony is *in its proper season*."—Macknight's Translation. Τὸ μαρτύριον καιροῖς ἰδίοις, Gr. a phrase of acknowledged difficulty. Professor Scholefield (*Hints for an Improved Translation of the New Testament*, in loc.) translates it "which is the testimony for his times," i. e. the times of the gospel. Compare 1 Tim. vi. 15. Tit. i. 3.

fered to remain in much comparative obscurity. He slightly glances at the preference which the Gentile should soon have over the Jew, when he told the people, in commendation of the Roman centurion, that he had "not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," as in him.[5] But there was nothing in this to alarm the Jew for his privileges; nothing is said of the abrogation of circumcision, or of the Levitical law; nothing to encourage an expectation in the Gentile that the wall of partition would be taken away. A ray of that light which was to lighten the Gentiles, gleamed here and there before the crucifixion;[6] but it did not clearly appear till afterwards that the Jewish candlestick was removed out of its place, and that the sun of righteousness had arisen upon the heathen world. A crumb or two of the children's bread fell from the table, but the glory of the Lord had not yet departed from his people Israel. Still there were glimpses of the coming event. There was the prophecy, that while many should come from the east and the west, and should sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, the children of the kingdom should be cast out into

[5] Luke vii. 9.

[6] As for instance in the healing of the Canaanitish woman's daughter, Matt. xv. 22—28.

outer darkness.[7] There was the declaration to Jerusalem that her house was left unto her desolate.[8] There was the assertion (in contradiction to the boast of the Jews, that they were Abraham's seed, and therefore entitled to the promise made to their federal father) that "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin, and the servant abideth not in the house for ever."[9] And again; in allusion to the admission of the Gentiles within the pale of salvation—"I," saith he, "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."[1] If all men, then not the Jews only, but whosoever would accept the terms of mercy, without respect of nations. And, at another time, with a still more pointed allusion to the removal of the barrier which had so long stood between the Gentile world and God—"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."[2]

Yet so little was this doctrine understood, that the remotest hint dropped in allusion to it was treated by the Jews as a most extravagant supposition. Half in jealousy, half in contempt, their language was, "Will he go unto the dis-

[7] Matt. viii. 11, 12.
[8] Matt. xxiii. 38.
[9] John viii. 33—39.
[1] John xii. 32.
[2] John x. 16.

persed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?"[3] Even Peter needed a special revelation to remove his prejudices, and convince him, that the exclusive favour of God was withdrawn from his nation. Then, and not till then, after the descent of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his house, he perceives their freedom from the yoke of the law, and breaks out into a thankful and open acknowledgment of his former mistake and present conviction. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."[4] Subsequently to this event, the testimony of the apostles, even on a subject so ungrateful to their countrymen, is plain and uncompromising. Figuratively St. Paul shews by the image of an olive tree, that the natural branches were broken off, in order that the plant, which was wild by nature, might be graffed in.[5] And without a metaphor he had spoken before to the same effect in the early part of the same epistle. "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good,—to

[3] John vii. 35. Compare Rom. x. 19.

[4] Acts x. 34, 35. [5] Rom. xi. 16—24.

the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God." "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." Such was the apostle's language to the Roman converts. To those in Galatia he writes in a similar strain. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." To the church at Ephesus St. Paul magnifies the greatness of his "knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." The Ephesian converts had been previously reminded, that they who were "far off," had been "made nigh by the blood of Christ"—that Christ had made both Jew and Gentile "one"—had "broken down the middle wall of partition" between them—had "abolished in his flesh the enmity"—had "reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross."[6] Here every thing is so plain and intelligible, that the most unwilling

[6] Rom. ii. 9—11; ix. 7. Gal. iii. 28, 29. Eph. iii. 4—6; ii 13—16.

understanding cannot mistake; and "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."[7]

The same caution which our Lord adopted in unfolding the doctrines of his dispensation, he also observed with regard to the manifestations of his own character and person. Dr. Pye Smith says—"It entered into the scheme of divine wisdom that, when the Messiah was actually sojourning among men, and was pursuing the objects of his mission, his person, his offices, his doctrines, and all the characteristics of his dispensation, should be unfolded gradually and slowly."[8] Human wisdom would probably have suggested that the entrance upon his ministry should have been the signal for his assumption of the title of Messiah. Yet before the Jews, though taunted with making them to doubt through his silence,[9] he never openly acknowledges his claim to it. Locke remarks, commenting on John xii. 20, "Neither here, nor any where else, does he, even in these four or five last days of his life, (though he knew his hour was come, and was prepared for his death, and scrupled not to manifest himself to the rulers of the Jews to be the Messiah, by doing miracles

[7] Is. xxxv. 8

[8] *Scripture Testimony to the Messiah,* book iii. chap. iii.

[9] John x. 24.

before them in the temple,) ever once in direct words own himself to the Jews to be the Messiah; though by miracle and other ways, he did every where make it known to them, so that it might be understood."[1] He veiled himself, probably with allusion to the prophecy of Daniel,[2] under the unpretending title of the Son of man. "The expression in itself is such that nothing can be conceived more simple and unassuming. It was therefore admirably calculated to answer the purposes of our Lord's habitual testimony concerning himself, during that period in which his wisdom saw it right to suspend the universal declaration of his claim to be the Messiah."[3] His avowals to his disciples were guarded by strict injunctions not to divulge the fact to others. "He charged them that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ."[4] But this reserve was to have its limit. The interdict was soon to be taken off. The mouths of the witnesses were to be opened, and Peter was to proclaim upon the house tops what he had heard in the ear; and to "let all the house of Israel know assuredly," whether they would hear, or whether

[1] *Reasonableness of Christianity*, p. 106.

[2] Dan. ix. 13.

[3] *Smith's Scripture Testimony*, &c. book iii. chap. iii.

[4] Matt. xvi. 20. See also Mark viii. 29, 30. Luke xxii. 67. John x. 24.

they would forbear, that "God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."[5]

It appears, then, from the foregoing remarks, that, throughout our Lord's personal intercourse with his disciples, much reserve was maintained on topics which they afterwards fully comprehended; and in proportion as by reason of use their senses were exercised to discern both good and evil, larger communications were made to them respecting the divine purposes. "With many parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to bear it." "These things," said he, "have I spoken unto you in proverbs; but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father."[6] In process of time, therefore, when the minds of men were, in some degree, prepared, that knowledge which had been communicated at first in obscure sayings, little heeded or understood, was revealed so fully and explicitly, that he who ran might read, and what was spoken in darkness, was preached in light. The words of Christ were as seed, buried for a while in the ground, but quickened in due time into a fruitful plant, producing an abundant harvest.

The same reasons which would urge the neces-

[5] Acts ii. 36. [6] Mark iv. 33. John xvi. 25.

sity of gradually discovering the scheme of the new dispensation to the constant attendants on our Lord's ministry, apply with still greater force to the case of his occasional hearers.

Accordingly we find, that, whatever reserve he maintained with his disciples, his communications to them were much more free and open than with the mixed multitude which composed his general auditories. The parables delivered publicly without comment or application, were often explained in private, and their spiritual meaning pointed out, as in the case of the sower and of the tares. The value of this and similar privileges was urged as a blessing, which deserved thankful acknowledgment. Jesus "turned unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see the things that ye see."[7] It was a case of frequent occurrence, that, after some remarkable exercise of his power of healing diseases, he commanded that the cure should be kept secret, lest a premature disclosure should be made of his possession of an attribute which indicated divine authority. He said unto the cleansed leper, "See thou tell no man." He straitly charged the two blind men, saying, "See that no man know it." When great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all, he "charged them, that they should not make him

[7] Luke x. 23.

known." Even the display of his glory manifested in the transfiguration was strictly ordered to be concealed till a fixed time had elapsed. "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead."[8]

So too in the Lord's prayer, there was originally no direction given to present all petitions in Christ's name, because it was not yet the proper season for declaring the doctrine of intercession explicitly. Afterwards, when the reason for reserve was removed, and the way into the holy of holies through the mediator could be thoroughly understood without endangering, through a premature discovery, the appointed order of events, the proper channel of approach to the throne of grace was promulgated, and a new medium of acceptance of powerful and unfailing efficacy was set forth. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."[9]

Our Lord's practice, therefore, as a teacher of divine truth, in a ratio of progressive advancement from the first elements to the highest mysteries of religion, was perfectly consistent with his own rule—"Unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be

[8] Matt. viii. 4; ix. 30; xii. 15, 16; xvii. 9.

[9] John xvi. 24.

given."[1] At the same time it carries with it a beautiful illustration of the sayings of two royal preachers—"The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way." "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."[2]

1. The view which has been now taken of our Saviour's method of teaching, furnishes an answer to a sceptical objection which Deists have often urged against the bible. They oppose the epistles to the gospels, and, because they cannot find in one portion of scripture the same plain and unreserved exposition of doctrine which is contained in the other, they attempt to throw discredit on the whole page of inspiration, and allege the existence of serious discrepancies and inconsistencies between its several parts. Lord Bolingbroke, for instance, does not hesitate to declare, that two gospels are comprised in the new testament; and in a still bolder spirit of infidelity another writer maintains, that St. Paul has preached a gospel which directly contradicts that of Christ.[3]

[1] Mark iv. 24, 25. [2] Ps. xxv. 9. 14. Prov. iv. 18.

[3] Mr. Chubb. See *Dwight's System of Theology*, vol. ii. 225.

If, however, there is any foundation for that supposed scheme of gradual instruction, which has been attempted to be traced, the force of these objections will be in a great measure removed. As to the assertion, that the system of St. Paul contradicts that of Christ, it can only be met with a direct negative, because it is contrary to fact, and to that species of fact which admits of proof. There is much that is supplemental and explanatory in the epistles of St. Paul; but not a single expression or sentiment, which, to a fair and unprejudiced inquirer, can appear like a contradiction of the doctrine of the gospels.

But, when the nature of these doctrines is considered, many of them so repugnant to the prejudices and opinions of the people among whom they were first promulgated, and so difficult to be comprehended, in their spiritual import, by the human mind, disqualified as it is for the discernment of its eternal interest by the prevailing and surrounding engrossments of temporal objects; we can easily see how, in the slow and progressive development of a series of truths, that connecting link which runs through and unites the whole has been overlooked, by those whose predispositions would lead them to be quick-sighted in discerning objections, and

to welcome, without any very close or accurate scrutiny, the existence of supposed difficulties.

If, however, it would have been inconsistent with that method, which the wisdom of the divine prophet of the christian dispensation has adopted as the most suitable for its promulgation, to give to the world such an abrupt and immediate revelation of its whole economy, as would leave nothing to be unfolded or explained by its subsequent inspired preachers;—if the ground of the heart were to be first prepared by the culture of the great husbandman for the reception of the seed, which his commissioned and appointed labourers were afterwards to plant and water;—if in the moral, as in the natural world, the order of things were to be the same, —first the blade, then the ear, and finally the full corn in the ear—then, surely, it ought no longer to be a reason for astonishment and sceptical doubt, if Paul be more full upon the deep subjects of the gospel and the great mystery of godliness than Christ; and even if the servant be permitted to do greater things, and to enlarge more abundantly than his master on the marvellous riches of divine love. It would have been clearly improper to have announced the plan of redemption, otherwise than by types and shadows, before the sacrifice, which expiated

the sins of the world, was completed. But when all was finished, and the dying voice of the Saviour of mankind had pronounced that the purpose of his incarnation was fulfilled,[4] then the beauty of the whole design could be measured and comprehended; and the preachers of the gospel could point specifically to the lamb of God, who had already paid the price for the ransom of his people. Provided that Christ himself be established as the corner stone of the building, it is not derogatory to his dignity, or inconsistent with his glory, that the builders, whom he has appointed and gifted for their office, should raise on that foundation, once laid, a superstructure, framed for manifesting the plan of its heavenly contriver to the whole world. Its beauty and its harmony are his alone; its glory his; and its adaptation to its intended purpose must be ascribed exclusively to the influence and working of his almighty power.

2. The subject under consideration suggests to preachers, on the highest authority, the necessity of meting out the word with judgment, and ministering the gift as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Owen remarks,[5] that it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to take care, not only that the doctrine which they preach be true, but also that it be seasonable

[4] John xix. 30. [5] On Heb. vi. 1.

with respect to the state and condition of their hearers. Herein consists no small part of that wisdom which is required in the dispensation of the word. Truths unseasonable are like showers in harvest. It is "a word fitly spoken," that is beautiful and useful.[6] Yea, "every thing is beautiful in his time," and not else.[7]

Should this be styled policy, and thought to partake too much of worldly wisdom to accord with the simplicity of men who depend on the working of the Spirit, rather than on the foolishness of human devices, for the efficiency of their labours; let it be remembered, that it was the policy of Christ, and has the warrant of the highest sanction for its lawfulness. If there will be always an opposition to the doctrines of the gospel, while the natural desires of man's heart are at enmity with God; then it will always behove the teachers of those doctrines, who, in a certain sense at least, are still sent out as "sheep among wolves," to be "wise as serpents."[8] If, from the very nature of the human mind, some times be more suitable than others for producing the desired impression, some capacities more prompt than others in profiting by the truths of scripture, some

[6] Prov. xxv. 11. [7] Eccles. iii. 11.

[8] Matt. x. 16.

understandings less clouded by prejudices and less exposed to error, some hearts sooner melted into conviction, than others under more unfavourable circumstances, then it will be always necessary for the stewards of the mysteries to be instant in season and out of season; to let no opportunity pass by unimproved; to give here a little, there a little, as the people are able to bear it; to go on from strength to strength, as they see the elements of the christian faith are comprehended by the understanding, and applied to the conscience of their hearers.

The example of St. Paul in this respect has been already considered. His advice to Timothy, formed under his own inspection for the work of a minister, harmonizes entirely with his own practice. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."[9] And, again, he urges the same discrimination on the Roman converts—"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."[1]

So too the apostle John separates the believers into classes, according to their measure of spiritual knowledge, and gives to each such instruction as may suit their respective stages of ad-

[9] 2 Tim. ii. 15. [1] Rom. xiv. 1.

vancement. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake:—I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning:—I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one."[2]

Here then, in these examples, the christian preacher will best seek his model. He will temper his zeal for enlightening the souls committed to his charge with judgment and circumspection; he will press forward, but gradually and with caution, lest in his haste he place a stumbling-block in the way of those, who may not be far from the kingdom of heaven. As Baxter says, "This work must be carried on prudently, orderly, and by degrees; milk must go before strong meat: the foundation must be first laid before we build upon it. Children must not be dealt with as men at age. Men must be brought into a state of grace, before we can expect from them the works of grace. The work of conversion, and repentance from dead works, and faith in Christ, must be first, and frequently, and thoroughly taught. The stewards of God's household must give to each their portion in due season. We must not go beyond the capacities of our people ordinarily; nor teach

[2] 1 John ii. 12, 13.

them the perfection that have not learned the principles."[3]

At the same time, while we imitate our Lord and master, Jesus Christ, and the great elders of his church in this respect, we must be on our guard, lest timidity, and not prudence, be the cause of our reserve. "The fear of man bringeth a snare."[4] At certain seasons it is necessary to speak to men "which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely;" keeping back "nothing that is profitable," and declaring to them "all the counsel of God."[5] Imperfect or clouded views of truth must not be put forth under the pretence of ministerial discretion. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, it will not effectually warn the wicked, arouse the careless, or instruct the ignorant. Scripture must be preached scripturally. "The gospel is a mighty engine, but only mighty when God has the working of it."[6] And since the duty of communicating to mankind the glad tidings of salvation, in the fulness of its mysteries, devolved in a great measure on the apostles, it is to them, or rather to Christ, who was with them always, and who spake by them, that we must look for the authorized mode of deliver-

[3] *Reformed Pastor.*

[4] Prov. xxix. 25.

[5] Ps. lviii. 5. Acts xx. 20. 27.

[6] *Adam's Private Thoughts.*

ing those great truths which it was the business of their lives to promulgate. Their practice, so far as the Holy Spirit has revealed it in the short history of their labours which the new testament contains, fully illustrates the duty of labouring to unite the difficult provinces of a faithful ministry on the one hand, and of an acceptable ministry on the other. Their exhortations teach us to "commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"—and their success instructs us that we must be "made all things to all men," as far as our integrity will permit, that we may "by all means save some."[7] Conciliation, so long as it does not lead us to compromise our principles, is one of the most productive instruments of ministerial usefulness.

3. Again, if Christ be a progressive teacher of truth, they, who profess to study in his school, must take care that their attainments be in like manner progressive. They must choose the church of Thyatira, not that of Ephesus, for a pattern. Their last works must be more than the first; not such as will expose them to the charge of having left their first love.[8] Christ expects progress proportioned to opportunity. He expostulates with his disciples after they had been long under his teaching, "Are ye also yet without understanding?" And again, on ano-

[7] 2 Cor. iv. 2. 1 Cor. ix. 22. [8] Rev. ii. 4. 19.

ther occasion, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?"[9] It is a characteristic sign of false teaching or of unprofitable hearing, if men are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."[1]

Such however is the nature of man, that no part of a minister's duty will more require the exercise of a sound discretion than the superintendence of the individual progress of his congregation. In private intercourse with the several members of his flock he will experience less difficulty in proportioning the subject of his advice to their respective cases; but his judgment will be often subjected to a severe trial in the choice of topics for public ministration, where hearers of different capacity and growth in grace are assembled together. Much wisdom will be needful lest he be "lacking" to some of his hearers, while he "abounds" to others.[2] Expressions which may be suitable for one state of mind will be often very dangerous for another; in expostulating with the lukewarm, or reproving the backslider, the generation of God's children may be condemned;[3] in awakening the

[9] Matt. xv. 16. John xiv. 9. Compare St. Paul's complaint, Heb. v. 12.

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 7. [2] Jer. xxiii. 4. Eph. i. 8.

[3] See Ps. lxxiii. 14. Prayer Book version.

thoughtless, or rousing the profligate to a sense of their guilt, the bruised reed may be broken, or the smoking flax quenched; the impenitent may take to themselves the promises of mercy intended for repentant sinners; while the poor in spirit, and they that mourn, may be discouraged by unseasonable denunciations of the vengeance of God proclaimed against all unrighteousness.

In this respect, again, God's gradual revelation of himself to his church, will prove the safest example. Care must be taken not to overfill the vessels; but, at the same time, the sloth or inattention of some of the members must not become a hindrance to the progress of the whole body; and none must be left without that portion of meat in due season, which is needful for the support of their spiritual life. "It is a great degree of knowledge," says Quesnel, "to be able to observe and follow the motions of grace, on which all depends; and which commonly performs its work by degrees, and step by step, in the souls of particular persons, and almost always in a great people."[4]

Nor will the husbandman in God's vineyard forget to water the seed which he has planted. He will return again and again to watch the good work which has been wrought in the soul,

[4] On Matt. ix. 14—17.

and to strengthen the christian in his faith; like our Lord, who came a second time into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine, to see the fruits of his first miracle, and confirm them by another.[5] Above all, he will always remember the duty of prayer for the improvement of those who are committed to his charge. Christ prayed much for his disciples; and the chief subject of St. Paul's prayers for the churches was the same as that of St. Peter for his brethren, that they should "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."[6]

4. The example of Christ serves also to warn the pastor against precipitation in his ministry. Many have found reason to lament the failure of plans of promised usefulness, proposed inopportunely, or urged with too much vehemence, which might have been blessed to much spiritual good, had they been introduced with more discretion. This applies particularly to the case of new ministries. Hasty external changes are seldom productive of the advantage expected; they are looked upon with suspicion, and considered as condemnatory of past measures, and forerunners of still more extensive innovations. On

[5] John iv. 46.

[6] 2 Pet. iii. 18 See also Eph. i. 16—19; iii. 14—19. Col. ii. 1, 2.

this subject the sentiments of the late Mr. Beachcroft, a man of much ministerial experience, and of unquestionable devotion to his pastoral duties, are well deserving consideration. "I have ever considered the great temptation of a young minister to be his activity; up, and be doing. This was once my own case. A sort of restlessness because things did not go fast enough."[7] "Youth," said Mr. Cecil, "is the peculiar season of precipitation: the young man's motto is 'onward!' There is no such effectual cure of this evil as experience; when a man is made to feel the effects of his precipitation, both in body and mind; and God alone can bring a man thus acquainted with himself."[8] In a similar spirit Mr. Scott writes to his sister—"I was much too earnest, and in a hurry: said too much, and went too far: and thus, out of my abundant love, surfeited you. Forgive me this wrong. It was well meant, but ill-judged, and worse received."[9] It was a wise rule of the same experienced minister—"Do nothing in haste. Pray, pray, pray, before you determine."[1] The biographer of Mr. Legh Richmond says—"where he met with opposition, he did not hazard the failure of his measures by indiscreetly urging

[7] *Methuen's Life of the Rev. R. P. Beachcroft*, p. 95.
Remains, p. 264.
[9] *Life of Rev. T. Scott*, p. 142.
[1] *Life*, &c p. 203.

them; but rather left his arguments silently and gradually to produce their effect. Circumspection and caution marked every part of his conduct; his great aim being at all times to 'give no offence in any thing, that the ministry might not be blamed.'"[2] Henry Martyn's experience teaches the same lesson. After reading the first epistle of St. John with his moonshee, a conversation ensued on the doctrines of the Trinity, and of the divinity of Christ, which gave Martyn occasion to suggest a doubt whether the Koran were the word of God. "He grew angry," writes Martyn, in his diary, "and I felt hurt and vexed. I should have done better to have left the words of the chapter with him, without saying any thing. I went also too far with the pundit, in arguing against his superstition; for he also grew angry. If any qualification seems necessary to a missionary in India, it is wisdom—operating in the regulation of the temper, and the due improvement of opportunities."[3] He gives advice in the spirit of this wisdom to his friend Mr. Corrie, then stationed at Chunar. "I long to hear of a christian school established at Benares; it will be like the ark of God brought into the house of Dagon. But do not be in a

[2] *Memoirs of Rev. Legh Richmond*, p. 121.

[3] *Life of Henry Martyn*, p. 231.

hurry: let your character become known, and you may do any thing."[4]

5. There is, lastly, another point of view in which our Lord's treatment of those whom he was gradually instructing in the mysteries of his dispensation deserves consideration.

Christ never seemed to despise the smallest ray of light which had dawned on the spiritual discernment of his followers. He encouraged the inquirer after divine truth, and promised more grace, and greater knowledge. "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance."[5] He proportioned his acquirements to the degree of their attainments.[6] He warmed and enlivened the faint affections by dwelling on the love of the Father; but he never quenched the glimmering spark of feeling, which, however weak in its commencement, yet gave promise of becoming finally, under due management, the kindling source of a "great fire." No word ever dropped from his lips which could have a tendency to repress the progress of a heart awaking to a consciousness of sin, or appear to disparage that measure of light and grace, however defective, which had broken in at length upon a prejudiced or worldly-minded hearer. Though the lawyer came to him with

[4] *Life*, &c. p. 247. [5] Matt. xxv. 29.
[6] Matt. ix. 14—17.

no good intention, and willing to justify himself, rather than to be informed respecting "eternal life," yet our Lord commended him, where commendation was due. "Thou hast answered right."[7] He rebuked his disciples for discouraging one who, though he believed in him, was not one of his followers.[8] Though he pronounced, that they who had riches should hardly enter into the kingdom of God, yet, when the ruler of the synagogue, or the nobleman of Capernaum, professed a readiness to believe in his power, or when rich Zaccheus manifested a desire to see him, he did not reject their overtures, because they proceeded from individuals of a class from among whom, at least in the infancy of a despised religion, not many should be saved; but dealt with them in his mercy according to the measure of their faith.[9] When Nicodemus came to him by night, he did not repulse him from his presence as an unfit disciple, because his new convert had not dared to confess openly his belief in the Messiah before the council of which he was a member.[1] The same conciliatory tone marked our Lord's answer to the scribe, whom he pronounced to be "not far from the kingdom of God;" although the conversation,

[7] Luke x. 28. [8] Luke ix. 50.
[9] Matt. ix. 18. Luke xix. 3. John iv. 47.
[1] John iii. 2.

which ended with so mild and encouraging an assurance, appears to have commenced in an attempt to entrap our Saviour by putting to him an insidious question.[2]

All these instances seem to shew, that, however small may be the seed of divine truth which has been yet sown in the heart, Christ would have it invigorated and fostered; that he does not desire, that the plant which in a more kindly soil has flourished luxuriantly, and brought forth fruit an hundred fold, should be hastily undervalued or rooted out, because in another situation its growth has been more tardy, and its produce less abundant. Christian perfection is not to be attained in a day; nor is it in accordance with the ordinary operations of grace that the warfare of the believer should be accomplished by a single teaching of the Spirit.

These considerations forbid our treating with contempt, or passing an indiscriminate censure upon such as do not come up to some supposed criterion of character. It is uncharitable to condemn those, whom it does not yet appear that God has condemned; and presumptuous to assign a limit to that long-suffering to which every soul of man is so deeply indebted.

And yet the line of demarcation is sometimes so strictly drawn, that it would seem as

[2] Mark xii. 28—34, compared with Matt. xxii. 35.

if no attainments, which fell short of a prescribed standard, were to be accounted as indicative of the existence of any religious feeling. Some hearers think all preachers unedifying, who have not a certain mode of address, or a certain view of the duties of their ministry. Some will listen to none who are not exclusively doctrinal; others to none who are not exclusively practical. Some are offended with the very mention of "good works;" others close their ears at the sound of "grace." Some give up as lost those, who, if fed for a time with the milk of the word, might be led eventually to desire the strong meat of the gospel. Some blame all condescension to the weakness of a christian brother, who, under a more judicious treatment, might finally be rendered a signal monument of the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

It would be more consonant to our Lord's example, if, when the prospect on the whole is favourable, an endeavour were made to attract those, who are yet lacking one thing, to a clearer knowledge of the way of salvation by forbearance and seasonable admonition, instead of arbitrarily rejecting them by the sentence of human opinion from any participation in the fellowship of christian hopes and privileges. If Christ do not break the bruised reed, neither should we. It becomes us to act to our brethren as wives are

instructed to behave to their husbands; that "if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by our conversation, coupled with fear."[3] If the apostle thought it necessary to exhort believers to "add to their faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity;"[4] he must have contemplated the possibility, that those who were then deficient in some of the christian graces, might afterwards become thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

In a word, the whole experience of the nature of the human heart ought to teach us to be moderate and humble in forming our judgments of others—to hope even against hope—and in cases, where even charity herself is constrained to admit that appearances are inauspicious, to remember, that with God all things are possible, and that he sometimes changes the heart in a manner and at a time the least expected. "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them."[5] Nothing is farther removed from the true principle of christian love, than that pharisaical spirit which includes in one sweeping sentence of condemnation all, whose opinions, in

[3] 1 Pet. iii. 2. [4] 2 Pet. i. 5.

[5] Eccles. ix. 1.

matters not involving the essential principles of the gospel, vary from our own; or all, who from different habits of feeling, or other causes purely constitutional, display in a less lively and evident manner the strength of their religious affections.

CHAPTER VI.

Christ's adaptation of incidental Occurrences or Expressions to the Purposes of Instruction.

When St. James wished to deter the Jews from too indiscriminately desiring the distinction of teachers in the christian church, he dwells particularly on the difficulty of ordering their conversation in such a manner as to reflect no dishonour on so sacred a profession. On their circumspection in the government of the tongue, not only the credit of their office, but the success of their ministerial labours, would greatly depend. Even among the best of men, a deplorable inconsistency in this respect was frequently to be observed; and the gift of speech became so often an occasion of stumbling, that a christian might be considered perfect, in proportion as he was able to subdue the unruliness of the tongue. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man .... Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing."[1]

[1] James iii. 2. 8—10.

With a similar conviction of the difficulty of exercising this branch of practical religion, St. Paul gives a special rule on the subject, to the intent that the language of believers in all the circumstances and relations of life should not only be inoffensive, but of an edifying tendency—"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."[2] And the psalmist has made it the distinctive character of the righteous, that his mouth "speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment."[3]

The difficulty of obeying the apostolical injunction in this respect must have been felt by all, who have ever accustomed themselves to review their conduct with honest self-examination. They must be conscious of failing often against charity, which speaketh no ill of its neighbour—of having often grieved the good by saying what ought not to have been said; or of having encouraged the wicked by omitting to say what ought to have been said—of many an idle word or inconsistent discourse which has gone forth past recall; and has been recorded for judgment against the utterer at the day of general account.

But chiefly must those, whose official duty it is to be telling of the Lord's works in the great congregation, have experienced the necessity of

[2] Col. iv. 6. [3] Ps. xxxvii. 30.

praying, that, in their more familiar and daily intercourse with their people, grace may be multiplied to them in proportion to their need; and of setting always a watch upon themselves, lest, like Moses,[4] they speak unadvisedly with their lips, and bring disrepute and suspicion on the cause they have undertaken. They must not be "ministers in the pulpit, but, at the best, only ordinary christians every where else."[5] One light expression inadvertently suffered to escape them, or one opportunity of recommending religion neglected or unimproved, will press heavily on the recollection of those, who have a strong sense of the extensive harm which thoughtlessness in these respects often produces. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother"[6] in a moral sense, as often as we tempt him, by a want of proper seriousness in our own deportment, or forego availing ourselves of the advantage of a seasonable observation, whenever it may be introduced with propriety.

Now it was foretold of Christ, that "grace should be poured into his lips,"—and that the Lord God had "given him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that was weary."[7] It

[4] Numb. xx. 10. Ps. cvi. 33.

[5] *Life of Rev. T. Scott*, p. 102.

[6] Gen. xlii. 21. [7] Ps. xlv. 2. Isa. l. 4.

would be unnecessary to shew, how satisfactorily these predictions were fulfilled in our Lord. Even the men of Nazareth, prejudiced as they were by local associations, and perplexed by the meanness of his supposed origin, "all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."[8] My object is rather to direct attention to one very remarkable feature of that wisdom which Christ displayed in his ministry—the manner in which he adapted incidental occurrences or expressions to the purpose of instruction. The consideration of this subject will perhaps afford some hints for the better discharge of that difficult duty to which allusion has been made.

If a biblical student, whose mind was alive to original impressions, were perusing, for the first time, the life of our Saviour, he could not fail to be struck by the wisdom with which every incident is directed to the promotion of one common end. There is an unity of design pervading the whole, never interrupted by inconsistencies or digressions which might have the effect of diverting the mind from the prominent subject of attention, or of diminishing the influence arising from the general tenor of his more serious discourses. It would seem as if every word and action were studied with a

[8] Luke iv. 22.

view of affording a kind of prophetic fulfilment of the apostolic rule—"Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."[9]

At the same time it is among the wonders of our Lord's ministry, that there is nothing forced in the transitions which are perpetually made from external circumstances to doctrinal or moral points. All is natural, and without effort; the suggestion, as it were, of the moment. There is a difference, worth remarking, between Christ and the writers of the epistles in this respect. Their imagery is generally drawn from the worship of the temple; the Jewish institutions; the Levitical code, civil and ecclesiastical; or other objects connected with the religious system of the Old Testament. Our Lord, on the contrary, borrows his illustrations from what happens to be before him; from the appearances of nature, or such works and labours of art as chance to present themselves to his view. A casual expression, an incidental occurrence, the season of the year, a particular place, the vicinity of a building, or the features of the surrounding country, serve to introduce and illustrate matters of gravest import and replete with serious instruction.

This peculiarity has been remarked by writers

[9] 1 Cor. x. 31.

on the life of Christ. Bishop Law,[1] and archbishop Newcome[2] have both given examples of it. Bishop Warburton alludes to it in the following passage: "The properest season we can conceive for the institution of the last supper, was the instant of time between the celebration of the type, and the offering of the antitype. This time likewise corresponded with Christ's usual practice, who was wont to deliver his instructions by actions and expressions bearing allusion to what passed before his eyes, or presented itself in the natural course of things to his observation."[3] Jortin says—"Whosoever examines the discourses of our Lord with attention, may find in them a certain character and way of speaking peculiar to him. His manner, by which he may be distinguished, consists in raising matter of instruction and moral reflection from the things which were at hand, which presented themselves to him and to his audience. Hence it is that his sermons to the people and his conversations with his disciples allude perpetually to the time of year, or to the place

[1] *Reflections on the Life and Character of Christ.*

[2] *Observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine Instructor,* part 1, ch. ii. sect. 6. See also *Dr. Pye Smith's 'Scripture Testimony to the Messiah,'* vol. 2. part i. p. 126. *Newton on Dan.* p. 148, note *a*. *Townson's Sermon on* Luke iv. 32.

[3] *Div. Leg.* vol. vi. p. 173.

where he was, or to the objects surrounding him, or to the occupation and circumstances of those to whom he addressed himself, or to the state of public affairs."[4]

There seems to be some connexion between this adoption of occasional illustrations *pro re nata*, and the use of parables; and both modes of teaching were probably suggested by the same cause, the fondness of the oriental nations for figurative language. In selecting a few examples of the practice from the different gospels, I shall first bring forward some which have reference to natural objects.

I. Much of our Lord's time, from the character of his occupation, was passed in the temple. Its beauty and magnificence were favourite subjects of remarks among the Jews; and they frequently challenged admiration for the size and splendour of its buildings, as the boast of their city, and the memorial of their national religion. It might be expected, therefore, that our Saviour would avail himself of so popular a topic to present, through a palatable medium, truths, which could not but be unacceptable to many of his hearers. Allusions to it consequently are very frequent; and to one of them the false witnesses were indebted for the only subject, even of false accusation, which they

[4] *On the Truth of the Christian Religion,* Discourse vi.

could bring against him. It was after he had purged the temple from the abuses which defiled it, that he foretold to the Jews the rebuilding of the spiritual temple of his body which they would destroy.[5]

It was in the temple also that Christ quoted the prediction from the psalmist, that the stone refused by the builders would become the head-stone of the corner;[6] and the allusion was probably suggested by the sight of the object from which the metaphor was derived. Sheep were kept in one of the outer courts to supply the demand required for sacrifices;[7] and Jesus, taking notice of this circumstance, compares himself to the shepherd, and his people to the

[5] Matt. xxvi. 60, 61, compared with John ii. 18—22.

[6] Ps. cxviii. 22. Matt. xxi. 42.

[7] "Near this gate were several pens or folds, containing sheep and lambs to be sold for sacrifice; so that our Lord probably pointed to these, when he delivered in the temple that beautiful discourse concerning himself as the good shepherd, and his people as the sheep. Perhaps the porter, in that discourse, may allude to the porter of the gate, without whose permission none obtained admittance; and the conduct of a shepherd in going before his flock, might have been suggested either from memory, or from the observance of a flock coming to the pens, and following their keeper at that instant through the gate of the temple. For this is the eastern mode of conducting sheep, and it was our Saviour's custom to catch at circumstances, and render them the vehicle of religious instruction." *Brown's Antiquities of the Jews.* vol. i. p. 61.

flock, in the beautiful parable contained in the tenth chapter of St. John.[8] Beausobre mentions a peculiarity connected with the same inclosure, which appears to be alluded to in another passage. "It was unlawful for any one to come in here with a stick or a purse in his hand, with shoes on, or dusty feet. .... which circumstances may give some light to Matthew x. 9, 10, where Jesus Christ orders his disciples to walk in the discharge of their ministry with the same circumspection and care as men were wont to take when they designed to walk in the temple."[9] The numerous apartments with which the temple was surrounded, and the many persons who lodged in them, may serve to illustrate another expression—"In my Father's house are many mansions."[1] It was in the temple, "early in the morning," as St. John marks the hour, the proper time for trimming the sacred lamps, that our Lord broke forth into that emphatic declaration, borrowing his figure from the customary act which was then in the moment of performance—"I am the light of the world: he that

[8] See the predictions of him under this character, Ps. xxiii. Isa. xl. 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, &c.

[9] *Introd. to the New Test.* p. 62. See, however, Matt. xxii. 35, where dependence on their master's care seems to be the lesson intended to be inculcated.

[1] John xiv. 2.

followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."[2]

Again; after an impressive denunciation from our Saviour against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, the disciples, as they were leaving the temple, called his attention to the stupendous works of that structure; perhaps with some reference to that part of his preceding discourse which exposed the blindness of teachers who disallowed the obligation of oaths sworn by the temple itself or the altar, while they strictly enforced the binding nature of engagements made by the gold of the temple or the offerings. But Christ was not to be diverted from his spiritual views by prospects of earthly splendour, and he takes occasion to deliver a prophecy, which the sight around them, (though little calculated to make them expect its completion,) would render an impressive lesson of the instability of human grandeur. "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."[3]

After retiring from the city he sat with his disciples on the mount of Olives, which St. Mark mentions was "over against the temple;"[4]

[2] John viii. 2. 12. [3] Matt. xxiv. 2.
[4] Mark xiii. 3.

and there, in the immediate vicinity of the subject of his conversation, with a full view before him of the whole of that costly edifice which was the wonder of all mankind, our Lord proceeded to detail more circumstantially the events of its approaching destruction, and the signs intended for tokens to believers, that the predicted dispensation was near at hand. Never could his hearers have revisited the place where these things were uttered, or have turned their eyes towards the structure over which desolation was impending, without calling to mind the description of the last judgment, figuratively interwoven into the same discourse; or without reflecting on the sentences then finally to be passed on all classes of people. Their master's words would be indelibly fixed upon their remembrance by a sort of local association; and the recurring view of the things they had once seen as well as heard, would revive with peculiar freshness the memory of the solemn lesson, to which the casual vicinity of the temple had originally given occasion.

A knowledge of Jewish rites explains the propriety of a figure used by our Lord at another time, where the same readiness of allusion to passing events is beautifully marked.

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles it was customary to offer up, with peculiar pomp

of procession and solemn music, water drawn from the fountain of Siloam, as a special invocation of the blessing of him that giveth the former and the latter rain on the fruits of Judea. It was in reference to this annual ceremony that "in the last day, that great day of the feast," (as St. John particularly notes the exact time when this occurrence took place,) our Lord stood and invited the people to draw from him, as from a living fountain, the principle of spiritual life. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink . . . . But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."[5] And this metaphorical language would be the more intelligible to them, as the effusion of the Holy Spirit had been foretold by their own prophets under this very figure of living water. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit on thy seed."[6]

[5] John vii. 37—39. The libation of the water took place every day during the continuance of the feast; but the celebration was distinguished by additional ceremonies on the last or great day. It was probably while the priests and Levites were passing in procession with instrumental music, on their way to the altar of burnt offering, that our Lord addressed the people. See a description of the ceremony in Mr. Gresswell's Fifteenth Dissertation, vol. ii. p. 435.

[6] Is. xliv. 3.

Similar language occurs frequently throughout the Jewish scriptures, and it is imitated by St. Paul and St. John;[7] but it is worthy of notice, that the only other passage where Christ employs the same figure is remarkable for a similar appropriateness of reference to the circumstances of the moment. When he met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, he introduced his discourse by saying, "Give me to drink," in order to draw her attention to the truths concerning the influence of the Holy Spirit, which he was about to unfold under the image of living water. In the conference that followed, he enlarges under the same apposite metaphor on the satisfying and purifying nature of the fountain of grace—"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."[8] He might have explained to the woman in other words, and without a figure, that, if any one would turn from the exhausted or polluted sources of worldly wisdom or earthly happiness, and become athirst for the living God, he should be refreshed with an inexhaustible supply of the Holy Spirit, springing up in heavenly affections and purifying the soul from the vitiating pro-

[7] 1 Cor. x. 4. Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 6, &c.

[8] John iv. 14.

perties of sin. But, considering her situation, and the errand on which she came to the well, no language, however plain, would have been so intelligible as that which was actually used; no expedient, however plausible, would have impressed the doctrine of grace so indelibly upon her imagination.

On the very day after this allusion to the living water, Jesus, in discoursing with some Jews who were believers, enlarged on the glorious liberty and freedom from spiritual bondage, which it was the privilege of his disciples to enjoy. According to Sir Isaac Newton's calculation, this took place on a sabbatical year; and if, as he supposes, it was the custom to release the Hebrew servants from slavery on that year, as well as on the year of jubilee, it gives a new and very apposite signification to the language used. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free . . . . . The servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."[9]

The comparison of the Pharisees to a "whited sepulchre," though a familiar and obvious allusion to an object daily before the eyes of every dweller in Jerusalem, would be scarcely intelligible to one not conversant with Jewish customs.

[9] John viii. 32—36.

Whoever came in contact with a sepulchre contracted ceremonial pollution; and to avoid the frequent occurrence of such a circumstance among strangers who came to the feasts, and others not well acquainted with the edifices of the place, on a particular day of the year all the sepulchres were painted white with a mixture of chalk and water, that they might be so conspicuous as to be easily avoided.[1] Each of these would be a striking and visible memorial of our Lord's allusion; and would expose by a familiar emblem the inward hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, however varnished over by a shew of external righteousness.

Our Lord's illustrations of the subjects of his discourse from natural scenery, abound in all the gospels. When mention was made of the manna provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, he represented himself as "the true bread from heaven." When one of his disciples declared

[1] "A decimo quinto mensis Adar investigârunt, atque ubicunque sepulchrum invenerunt, cujus abluta ab imbribus esset dealbatio, eam restaurârunt, ut locus immundus dignosceretur, atque ut inde declinarent sacerdotes comesturi Trumam." Glossa ad Shekalim; et rursus ad Maasar Sheni; Sepulchra calce notârunt ad formam ossium, quam aquæ infusam circa sepulchrum fuderunt, ut dignoscerent inde omnes locum istum immundum esse, ideoque ab eo esse declinandum. *Lightfoot, Horæ Hebr.* ad Matt. xxiii. 27.

he knew not the place his master was preparing for them, or the way he was going; he answered by proposing himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life." The sight of a vineyard suggested the necessity of mutual love between himself and the members of his church, under the parable of the intimate union between the vine and its branches. Or if, as Grotius and others suppose, the discourse contained in the fifteenth and two following chapters of St. John was spoken at table, before he left the house to retire to Gethsemane, the metaphor would have been derived from the fruit of the vine, of which he had just been partaking at the paschal supper with his disciples. The eagerness with which the Pharisees chose out the chief rooms at feasts, furnishes an opportunity of inculcating humility, —the sight of the flowers of the field and the fowls of the air suggests a lesson respecting the superintending hand of Providence,- an invitation to eat bread is improved into a recommendation of the duty of disinterestedness,—the punishment of the insurgent Galilæans and the fall of the tower in Siloam give occasion to a general warning, that impenitent sinners, of whatever party or nation, would finally perish with a similar destruction.[2]

[2] John vi. 32; xiv. 3—6; xv. 1. Luke xiv. 7—11. Matt. vi. 26. 28—30. Luke xiv. 12—14; xiii. 1—5.

Thus, whether abroad or at home, a vehicle for instruction was always at hand. The return of the seasons of corn or fruit reminded him of the fields white already for the spiritual harvest, and of the criterion by which the true nature of principles might be ascertained —"By their fruits ye shall know them." The accidental circumstance of the disciples forgetting to take bread with them in one of their journeyings, introduced a warning to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." As he was at table in the house of a Pharisee, when one who sat at meat with him remarked, (probably without any spiritual ideas of a future state,) on the blessedness of those, who should eat bread in the kingdom of heaven, our Lord seizes the moment to deliver a parable, signifying the plentiful provision made for the souls of men in the scheme of redemption, and the mystical nature of the feast to which they were invited in the gospel." And, again, one of his fullest and most important discourses derives all its point from its allusions to the carnal desires of the multitudes who flocked around him after the miracle of the loaves.[3]

II. In a similar manner Christ occasionally

[3] John iv. 35. Matt. vii. 16—20; iv. 19; xvi. 5, 6. Luke xiv. 15—24. John vi. 22—58.

deduced a moral from public events, to which the minds of the people were directed at the time of their occurrence.

While Herod was leading his army through Judea to make war on the king of Arabia, our Lord inculcated the necessity of acquiring a deep conviction of man's natural weakness in the christian warfare, under the image of one king going to fight against another, and sitting down first to consult, whether he were able with ten thousand to meet him that came against him with twenty thousand.[4]

It was customary for the tributary kings in our Lord's time to receive the confirmation of their power from the hands of the Roman emperors. Josephus mentions, that Herod obtained in this way his kingdom from Antony, and it was subsequently granted him again by Augustus. His successors complied with the same ceremony. The parable in Luke, xix. 12—27, is constructed with reference to this circumstance. The Jews accused Archelaus to Cæsar at the court of Rome, and sent ambassadors to endeavour to procure his deposition. He was a "nobleman," as being the son of Herod, and "went into a far country," that of Italy, "to receive for himself a kingdom," the province of Judea, "and to return" thither. In the mean time "his citizens hated him, and

[4] Luke xiv. 31.

sent a message after him, saying," to Cæsar, "we will not have this man to reign over us." The intrigues of his subjects having failed, Archelaus, "having received the kingdom," at his return punished "those enemies, who would not that he should reign over them."[5] The application of the parable is obvious; either with reference to the judicial punishment inflicted on the Jews for their rejection of the Messiah; or, in a more extended sense, in allusion to Christ's descent from his mediatorial throne to execute justice on the wicked. The propriety of the moral, therefore, is independent of any temporary interest; but to those who were familiar with the recent circumstances, which suggested what may be called the story of the parable, it would be invested with a peculiar beauty from their coincidence with historical events, which would naturally form a prominent subject of conversation among them in consequence of their jealousy of the Roman yoke.

III. In the passages hitherto quoted, the figurative language of Christ has been principally derived from recent and well-known occurrences, or from the natural objects, which incidentally presented themselves to his view; and whether its effect be considered, in render-

[5] See *Le Clerc's Supplement to Hammond*, p. 145.

ing the spirit of his doctrines more intelligible to the comprehension of his followers, or in imprinting them more permanently on their memories by the local associations which would be created, the wisdom of the selection cannot be questioned. Some passages shall now be adduced, the context of which will shew that our Lord was equally solicitous to address himself with allusion to the peculiar character or circumstances of his hearers.

An early instance of this judicious practice occurs in the case of Nicodemus. This ruler of the Jews had come to Jesus privately under cover of the night; and though our Lord would not reprove severely this sign of weakness in his new convert, yet, in the conversation which ensued, he glances at his timidity, and reminds him that the preferring of darkness to light is the ground of the condemnation of infidels. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."[6]

In the same manner, after opening the eyes of the man who was born blind, he illustrates the design of his mission by a metaphor derived from the faculty of seeing. As by his efficacious

[6] John iii. 20, 21.

touch sight was restored to the blind eyes, so were the spiritually blind to be delivered, by faith in his doctrine, from their benighted condition, and enabled to discern the true light which had at length shined in darkness. The same figure further served to condemn the wilful blindness of the Pharisees, whose eyes should be judicially closed as a punishment for their obduracy. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."[7]

The affectionate reproof conveyed to Martha in that significant sentence—"one thing is needful"—also carried with it a seasonable allusion to the inexpediency of her being cumbered with much serving, while it recommended the adoption of the same good part, which her sister had already chosen.[8] Afterwards, when our Lord met her at Bethany on the occasion of the death of her brother, he turns that event to profit, by leading her mind from reflecting on the temporary disease and resuscitation of Lazarus, to comprehend the mystery of his own character as the resurrection and the life. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth

[7] John ix. 39. [8] Luke x. 41, 42.

in me shall never die."[9] Our Lord then appeals to her with a direct inquiry, in a manner unusual with him—"Believest thou this?" and her reply with an explicit confession of faith shews the immediate conviction, which had attended his seasonable exposition of so difficult a doctrine. It is further remarkable, that, in the very next verse, the strongest instance occurs which the gospels furnish of the term teacher, applied as a title to Christ. "When she had so said, she went her way and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, the master (the teacher, ὁ διδάσκαλος[1]) is come, and calleth for thee."

Other instances are not wanting, in which, when a peculiarly important or difficult doctrine was to be uttered, our Lord seems to have chosen to familiarize it to the understanding by some illustration arising from temporary circumstances.

It is not easy to conceive, for example, how that intimate union can exist between Christ and his people, which results from the love entertained by the redeemer for those whom he has ransomed from the power of Satan. He therefore took an opportunity of comparing it with

[9] John xi. 25, 26.

[1] Christus a Deo missus, ut homines doceret veram religionem, διδάσκαλος vocatur κατ' ἐξοχήν John xi. 28. Schleusner in voce διδάσκαλος.

the strength of natural relationship; and when one told him, that his mother and his brethren stood near, desiring to speak with him, he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."[2] He thus practically revealed in a way to be understood by all, that whatever could be conceived of instinctive attachment towards the nearest connexions of social life, was to be regarded as an image of the love of Christ for his redeemed people, and transferred in imagination as the fittest measure of his regard for the weakest and humblest of his sincere disciples.

In Ezekiel's vision of the holy waters springing from under the threshold of the temple, and communicating life even to the water of the dead sea, a representation had been afforded, under the image of a great multitude of fishes for which the fishers should spread forth their nets, of the future efficacy of the gospel to quicken and enliven the hardest hearts, and to render the most unlikely portions of the earth productive of spiritual increase.[3] But the figure employed in this prophecy has nothing of peculiar fitness connected with the context to recom-

[2] Matt. xii. 46—50. Compare also Luke xi. 27, 28.

[3] Ezek. xlvii. 6—10.

mend it, beyond the propriety with which the language of the emblem serves to describe the object intended. On the contrary, when our Lord borrowed the same metaphor for his call to Peter and Andrew, and summoned them to follow him that he might make them fishers of men, nothing could be more appropriate than such an address to men, who at that very time were casting their nets into the sea in the prosecution of their ordinary employment.[4]

With a similar propriety, after the conversion of Zaccheus the publican, and in his presence, he delivered the parable of the pounds; where, under the figure of the improvement of money lent for commercial purposes at a fair rate of interest, the proper use is inculcated of the several natural gifts entrusted to men.[5]

On another occasion, when a Pharisee, who had invited him to dinner, marvelled at his not complying with the customs of the Jews respecting the previous washings which their traditions required, he digressed from the mention of external ordinances to the necessity of inward purity, and exposed the hypocrisy, which made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, while the inward part was full of deceit and wickedness.[6]

[4] Matt. iv. 18, 19.

[5] Luke xix. 11—37.

[6] Luke xi. 37—39. See a parallel instance of an ap-

Thus with a consummate wisdom, which all teachers are bound to study and imitate, Christ accommodated the circumstances of his hearers to the furtherance of the grand objects of his ministry; and, at least in one sense of the words, was "made all things to all men."[7] And, as God called the magi with a star because they were skilled in the observation of the heavens, and such a phenomenon would be suitable to excite their attention to the purpose of its appearance, so did his beloved Son borrow from above the same superhuman intelligence, and avail himself of the accidents of each particular character to approach the heart and captivate the understanding of every description of hearer.

IV. It may be further observed, in connexion with this subject, that the expressions of our Lord were not only often borrowed from the objects or persons around him, but his actions were at times purposely designed to attract attention to some doctrine which was to be established in allusion to them.

The symbolical actions of the prophets will immediately occur, as having been founded on a similar principle. Joash taking his bow and

posite remark at the table of another host, Luke xiv. 15. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."

[7] 1 Cor. ix. 22.

arrows—Jeremiah hiding the linen girdle, or breaking the potter's vessel, or putting on bonds and yokes—Ezekiel carrying out his household stuff, or reclining on his left side for three hundred and ninety days, with a representation of Jerusalem before him—the cutting asunder of Zechariah's two staves, Beauty and Bands,—were impressive signs intended to call the observation of the Israelites in a lively manner to the hidden meaning which they concealed.[8] A visible transaction, taking place before their eyes, might sometimes serve to convey a profitable hint more forcibly than even line upon line and precept upon precept, to a people who had often remained unteachable under the most solemn delivery of the word of God.

Of the same character was the washing of the disciples' feet, before Jesus partook with them of the feast of the passover.[9] Though partly explained by our Lord immediately, so far as the thing signified consisted in the lesson of humility which the outward action was intended to convey; yet the more mysterious part of Christ's meaning was to be known hereafter.[1] Believers would understand

[8] 2 Kings xiii. 15—19. Jer. xiii. 1—11; xviii. 2—6; xix. 1—12; xxvii. 2—8. Ezek. xii. 2—7; iv. 4, 5. Zech. xi. 7—14.

[9] John xiii. 4—17.

[1] γνώσῃ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα. "But thou shalt know afterwards." Literally, "after these things;" i. e. when I have finished what

in future times, though not when the fact occurred, that it was principally intended as an emblem of the justifying blood of the redeemer, and of the sanctifying power of the Spirit; and that, so far from having been designed as a literal injunction of a religious ordinance, its chief object was to represent how "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."[2] "If I wash thee not," said he to Peter, who excused himself, "thou hast no part in me."

An example of another emblem used for a similar purpose is recorded by three of the evangelists; who all concur in reporting the sort of dramatic scene, which took place on the occasion. The disciples had contended among themselves privately, who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and at last came to our Lord to decide the question. In order to impress on their minds more strongly the value of humility, and the necessity of their renounc-

I am doing; whereas, "hereafter," (the translation in the authorized version,) would seem to imply a period more remote. So Professor Scholefield translates and explains the passage, in his *Hints for an improved Translation of the New Testament*. But it seems scarcely possible to put this limitation on the expression μετὰ ταῦτα. The figurative language, which our Lord uses in the eighth and tenth verses, could not have been understood by Peter until after the resurrection.

[2] Eph. v. 25, 26.

ing all views of an ambitious nature, "he called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said; Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."[3] Three times in this short address does our Lord point to the child before him to illustrate his argument in a more lively manner, and inculcate the moral of his discourse more forcibly.

So too the transfiguration may be considered in the light of a representation designed to describe the future glory of our Lord in a manner intelligible to finite understandings. When we read of his face shining as the sun, and his raiment being white as the light, the mind receives a notion of some most pure and ineffable brightness, in which all his perfections were revealed and all the heavenly excellencies of his character unfolded and displayed without reserve. It tended

[3] Matt. xviii. 1—6. Mark ix. 33—37. Luke ix. 46—48.

to realize to the apprehensions of the beholders some faint image of the invisible world; and painted to their imaginations the sun of righteousness, the light of the world, not as he appeared on the scene of his humiliation and sufferings; not in the likeness of sinful flesh and under the guise of a servant; not as a wanderer, despised and rejected of men, without a place to lay his head; not with a visage marred more than any man, and without form or comeliness; not as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; but with the fashion of his countenance altered; freed from those clouds which had obscured the brightness of his lustre, and shrouded the majesty belonging to him of right as the only begotten of the Father. It discovered to them a glimpse of the state that he had voluntarily relinquished,—of the glory, which was again in store for him when his work was finished,—and of that gracious transformation, which should finally be wrought in themselves; when this mortal should put on immortality; when, in virtue of his right as Saviour, he should "change their vile body, that it might be fashioned like unto his glorious body."[4]

Again; when our Lord saw fit, previously to working some of his miracles, to spit on the eyes of the blind man, and put his hands on them,[5] or to make clay of his spittle and anoint

[4] Phil. iii. 21.

[5] Mark viii. 23.

the eyes with it,[6]—or to put his fingers into the deaf ears or touch the dumb tongue[7]—it cannot be supposed that these outward actions, (some of which would seem to have a tendency rather to defeat than forward the object proposed,) were intended to have any other effect, than that of attracting attention to the cure about to be performed; or to signify by the use of the emblem, that the most unlikely means, under his blessing, might be productive of the greatest good.

When Christ breathed on his disciples after the resurrection,[8] the action did not imply, that he actually imparted the Holy Ghost in that manner, or by that channel, (for in point of fact the effusion did not really take place till the day of Pentecost,) but it served as an earnest of the future blessing, and was expressive of the sacred breath or spirit; intended at once to prepare them for its reception, and to shew that it would be derived from his power, and communicated from his fulness.

When the devils were suffered to enter into the swine and run violently down the precipice into the sea, and perish in the waters, it was to illustrate, by a visible example, the fatal rage and strength of Satan, and the final destruction of those who listen to his temptations.[9]

[6] John ix. 6.
[7] Mark vii. 33.
[8] John xx. 22.
[9] Matt. viii 32.

The cursing of the barren fig-tree was designed to convey an important lesson in a similar manner. At the time the sentence was pronounced—"No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever"—though our Lord did not call in any particular way the attention of his followers either to the words themselves, or to their import, the evangelist expressly notices, that "the disciples heard it." The day after, as they were passing by the same place, (undoubtedly owing to the secret leading of Christ,) "they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, calling to remembrance, saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away." The purpose of the miracle was then answered; the significant action had prepared their minds for the instruction to be founded on it; and our Lord immediately added as the moral of the transaction, "Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."[1]

If it were necessary to illustrate this part of the subject farther, the appointment of an outward visible sign in baptism might be quoted

[1] Mark xi. 13—22. Matt. xxi. 21, 22.

as designed to be emblematic of the inward spiritual grace; and the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, as symbols of the actual body of Christ, typically represented as bruised for our iniquities, and of his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Thus the insignificance of the external ceremony becomes sanctified by the spiritual application; and through the medium of visible things, things invisible and hard to be understood are rendered more obvious to human capacities.

We arrive, then, at this conclusion—that, whether by adapting his language to the circumstances of place or person, or by suiting his actions to the delivery of some important truth, nothing was omitted by our Lord to conciliate the prejudices of the ill-disposed, or to enlighten the darkness of error. There are divers languages for addressing the heart, as well as for speaking intelligibly to the ear; and if the mixed multitude, which marvelled at the effects of the descent of the Holy Spirit, heard the apostles telling in the tongue of each the wonderful works of God; the attendants on our Lord's ministry heard him also speak to each as it were in his own language; and accommodate his discourse by turns to the peculiar necessities of all, however various the occasions which presented themselves, or however different the characters composing his auditory.

The particular feature of our Lord's ministerial character which has been contemplated in the preceding pages, is replete with useful instruction.

1. It teaches, that it is a duty incumbent on the clergy to render all things subservient to the object of their ministry. They have a double account to settle—an account with God, as well as an account with man; and it may happen, that, though the latter party have nothing to object against them, yet their functions may not have been adequately discharged in the sight of the great high priest of the church.

It is very possible that the legitimate demands of man may be satisfied, while little progress has been made in the liquidation of the debt due to an higher power. Like Job, men may be clear at the tribunal of their fellow-creatures, but may have nothing to answer, when God rises up in judgment.[2] Even if their engagements be not exactly in the nature of a conditional contract, as far as man is concerned, yet there are certain extra-official obligations, certain undefined, though not less binding duties, which every man "set apart" for the ministry has undertaken to fulfil. His work must not be looked upon as an ordinary profession, to be conducted on that principle of reciprocity, which

[2] Job xxxi. 14.

governs the common dealings of mankind. He desecrates his high calling, when he considers it in the light of a mere commercial transaction, in which a bargain is struck for a certain return of services upon the payment of a certain price. Like his heavenly pattern, he will constantly be about his master's business; he will avail himself of times and seasons and topics, and present the truths of which he is the depository in so judicious and pertinent a manner, that his speech at all times may be seasoned with salt; and that no man may be able to accuse him of neglect, or inquire, like Esau, in the tone of mingled regret and reproach—Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?[3]

Much discretion is necessary for the due acquittal of the conscience in this respect; and therefore there must be much study of the divine model, and much earnest prayer for assistance from above, that "the priest's lips may keep knowledge,"[4] and speak seasonably, as well as affectionately or boldly, as the occasion may require. If he be a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, he will be like "an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."[5] He will conform himself to the capacities and identify himself with the

[3] Gen. xxviii. 36. [4] Mal. ii. 7.

[5] Matt. xiii. 52.

feelings of each; he will not speak of the first elements of christianity to those whose foundation is already laid and their faith settled; neither will he talk of the multiplied effusions of divine grace to those who have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. He will not cast his pearls before swine without discrimination or reserve; but he will not shrink in any company or at any time from avowing the principles on which he acts, and giving a reason for the hope that is in him. There is much of experimental wisdom in that saying of a minister —"Let him neither be ashamed of Christ's words, nor too impetuously obtrude them upon unwilling hearers. The caution will be doubly needful, towards persons filling the superior relations in life."[6] In a word, he will hold himself ready, and furnished richly in all knowledge, for every demand upon his good offices—he will comfort the broken-hearted—he will humble the proud—he will awaken the careless—he will guide the inquirer—he will recall the wandering—he will conciliate the prejudiced—he will endeavour, above all, by the general tendency of his conversation, to impart a salutary tincture to the society in which he mixes—and, even in his daily intercourse with the world, "will minister" in some sort "unto godly edifying." Considering

[6] *Life of Rev. T. Scott,* p. 140.

our Lord's example, and studying daily in his school of teaching, he will hear that solemn declaration, as if it were addressed with a special application to his own order and profession—"I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment!"[7]

2. We may learn also, as a general inference, the importance of imitating our Saviour in making religion the subject of conversation. "In every house where he was admitted he delivered his heavenly doctrines, 'his mouth speaking wisdom, and his tongue talking of judgment.'"[8]

The common arguments with which we are met on this topic are, the danger of profaning grave and solemn questions in miscellaneous society, or the altercation and personal heat which might be likely to arise from such a practice. These are points, however, which may be safely left to the judgment and common sense of the christian, directed by a spirit of faithfulness, and disciplined by ordinary prudence and consideration of consequences. In the mean time it can scarcely be denied, that, even among those who acknowledge the general duty of confessing Christ before men, there is often a very un-

[7] Matt. xii. 36.

[8] Ps. xxxvii. 30. *Robinson's Scripture Characters,* vol. iii. p. 9.

christian desertion of religious topics, altogether inconsistent with the profession of those who read and believe, that "whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of man and of his words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he shall come in his glory."[9] There is too often a keeping silence from good words, but without any of that pain and grief of which David complained as the consequence of his forced reserve.[1] How few can appeal like him to God, to bear testimony to their conscientious discharge of duty in this particular! "Lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest."[2]

[9] Luke ix. 26.

[1] Ps. xxxix. 2.

[2] Ps. xl. 9. Dr. Watts has some judicious remarks on this subject. "There is a time of keeping silence, and restraining our lips as with a bridle, even from every thing that is piously good, while some sort of wicked men stand before us. The best men are sometimes dumb with silence, and dare not speak of God or religion, lest they should cast their pearls before swine, and give their holy things to dogs, and lest they should provoke the unclean or envious animals to foam out their impurities, or to turn again and rend them. But I doubt this caution has been carried much farther by our own cowardice and carnality of spirit, than David ever practised it in the 39th Psalm, or than Jesus Christ meant it in the 7th of Matthew. Let us take heed then that we abuse not this prudent caution to a manifest neglect of our duty, and to withhold our lips from the things of God, where providence gives us a fair opportunity to speak of them." From "*An Exhortation to*

It is indeed remarkable, how much the language of the Israelitish law is at variance with the opinions of those, who connect the ideas of hypocrisy or affectation with every introduction of subjects relating to God. "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; and shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."[3] There is no reason to suppose, that these injunctions were not intended to be taken in a literal sense; and when it is considered how difficult it is to act up to their spirit in the present state of society, it contrasts very painfully the difference between the world as it actually is, and as God meant it to be.

Here then again we may have recourse to our Saviour's example, and learn from him how to "use knowledge aright" for the purposes of

Ministers," quoted in an useful volume, published by Mr. James, containing extracts from various authors on the christian Ministry. Edinburgh, 1824.

[3] Deut. vi. 6, 7. See also xi. 19. 1 Chron. xvi. 24. Archbishop Secker judiciously observes, that it is not meant that our conversation should be of nothing but religion; but that religion should have a due share in it.

promoting the cause of truth, and of disseminating the seeds of christian principle. For though the abuse of the tongue be a deadly evil, it is an instrument, which, if employed in the work of edification, may communicate life from circle to circle; and be the medium of imparting blessings, whose influence may extend far beyond the sphere of our own immediate observation. Dr. Watts says, "he that has the happy talent of parlour-preaching, has sometimes done more for Christ and souls in the space of a few minutes, than by the labour of many hours and days in the usual course of preaching in the pulpit." Bishop Horne uses similar language—"A seasonable word spoken in common conversation is often more regarded and attended to, than a formal discourse from the pulpit." It is related of Archbishop Usher that he was eminently useful in this respect. "If at his table, there you should find him clearing difficulties of scripture, especially when learned men did associate or visit him; however, improving every subject exceedingly to the edification of his hearers; the most learned or the meanest capacities might very much improve by his table-talk. He was so excellent in this, that Dr. Bernard says, it often put him in mind of the speech of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, 'Happy are these thy ser-

vants that stand about thee, and continually hear thy wisdom.'"[4]

In fact, our conversation is in general a very faithful symptom of the state of the heart. A man will naturally be telling of the things which interest him most; and in proportion as he experiences the comfort of religious truths in his own person, he will be anxious to make others participate in the same saving knowledge, and to extend the kingdom of Christ through all his connexions. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh: a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things."[5] But, as an acute observer remarks, "people in general have no notion of mixing religion with common life—with their pleasures—with their meals—with all their thoughts; they think it profane to talk of religion at dinner-time. Hence it is plain that these people have false notions of religion; they think

[4] *Life of Archbishop Usher*, prefixed to *A Body of Divinity*. Matthew Henry relates an anecdote on the same subject. "I remember to have read, that when the famous Bishop Usher and Dr. Preston, who were intimate friends, were talking together, after much discourse of learning and other things, the bishop would say—'Come, doctor, one word of Christ now before we part.' Christians who owe their all to Christ, should be often talking of him."—*Williams's Life of Matthew Henry*, p. 29.

[5] Matt. xii. 34, 35.

that their maker is an enemy to happiness, and that religion is fit for the closet only; or rather, such people have no true religion; it gives them no pleasure."[6]

3. There is another point of vital importance to the usefulness of every ministry, to which attention is invited by this subject. The language and images used by our Lord were so plain as to be intelligible to the capacities of the most illiterate of his hearers. There is no discourse recorded in which we are not reminded of the truth of his own saying, "The poor have the gospel preached to them."[7]

The difficulty of imitating our Saviour in this respect, can only be felt by those who have themselves conversed much with the lowest classes, especially in agricultural counties; and have thus learnt by painful inquiry, how little they understood of the ordinary phraseology of the pulpit.[8] Let the preacher question them,

[6] *Sermons and Miscellaneous Pieces,* by the late Rev. R. Mayow, p. 301; a book less known than it deserves to be; but containing much interesting matter connected with parochial duties.

[7] Matt. xi. 5.

[8] "Dr. Manton, no doubt, thought he had preached well, and as became him, before the Lord Mayor; but he felt himself reproved and instructed, when a poor man pulled him by the sleeve, and told him he had understood nothing of his sermon: there was an appeal in this poor man's breast to

and he will find, that, if he would be understood, he must clothe his ideas in the language of real life, and borrow his illustrations from images familiar to his hearers. The Romish church were well aware of this secret, and practised it with corresponding success. "It is notorious," says Mr. Le Bas, in his recent Life of Wiclif, "that the mendicant orders, at their first institution, were the most popular and effective preachers of their day. The Franciscans, more especially, were to be found in every village; and by the unwearied assiduity of their ministrations, they and the Dominicans, at one time, nearly monopolized the veneration and obedience of the populace throughout the christian world. One great secret of their power was the practice of addressing the people in a familiar style, and in the language of their country."[9] Let not the reformed pastor grudge to declare the eternal

nature: nature could not make any thing of the doctor's learning."—*Cecil's Remains,* p. 3. "A writer of sermons has often no idea how many words he uses, to which the common people affix either no meaning, or a false one. He speaks perhaps of 'relation to God;' but the people, who hear him, affix no other idea to the word, than that of father, or brother, or relative. The preacher must converse with the people, that he may acquire their words and phrases."—*Id.* p. 147.

[9] *Life,* &c. chap. vi.

word of God with the same simplicity with which the Romish teacher set forth his legendary tales and corruptions of the gospel of truth. "I, said Luther, esteem those to be the best preachers who teach the common people and youth most plainly and simply, without subtlety, screwed words, or enlargements. Christ taught the people by plain and simple parables."[1] Great plainness of speech is consistent with entire freedom from a colloquial or vulgar style; and the minister must attain it, before "the poor of the flock that wait upon him will know that it is the word of the Lord."[2] There is much good sense in the advice once given to Mr. Legh Richmond. "Don't use terms of science. The people have no abstract ideas,—they cannot understand comparisons and allusions remote from all their habits. Take words of Saxon derivation, and not such as are derived from Latin and Greek.

[1] *Table Talk.* And again; "We ought to direct ourselves in preaching according to the condition of the hearers; but all preachers commonly fail herein: they preach that which little edifieth the poor, simple people; as Bucer and Zuinglius at Marpurg, in all state and curious manner preached, thereby to bear the bell away; as though they would say, 'Behold, Luther and Melancthon, what learned fellows we are!' To preach plain and simply is a great art. Christ himself preacheth of tilling grounds, of mustard seed, &c., using altogether mean and simple similitudes."

[2] 1 Zech. xi. 11.

Talk of riches, not affluence,—of trust, not confidence. Present the same idea in a varied form, and take care that you understand the subject yourself. If you be intelligent, you will be intelligible."[3] The biographer of another active parochial minister says—"Mr. Mayow not only saw the ignorance of the poor, but that one very great cause of that ignorance was, the want of sufficient plainness of language and manner in the method of instructing them; he saw and felt that even the common colloquial language used among educated persons is above the comprehension of the generality of the poor; and that it is like a foreign tongue to them. Those who do not mix with the poor, and have not studied them closely, cannot be aware of this fact."[4] To the same effect writes Bp. Wilson—"With what truth can it be said that your sheep hear your voice, when you speak of matters above their capacity, or in a language or terms they do not understand? Can any man imitate a greater master of eloquence than Jesus Christ was, whose great excellence appears in making great truths understood by the meanest capacity?" And so we read that "the common people heard

[3] *Life*, &c. p. 153.

[4] *Memoirs of Rev. R. Mayow*, prefixed to his *Sermons*, &c. p. 39.

him gladly."[5] Let it be the prayer of the pastor, to be endued with wisdom "to utter by the tongue words easy to be understood;"[6] and his heart's desire, to see "the poor among men rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."[7]

[5] Mark xii. 37. [6] 1 Cor. xiv. 9.

[7] Is. xxix. 19. "Let all your performances be plain and scriptural. Choose for your pulpit subjects the plainest, and most needful truths; and endeavour to make them plainer. Be serious in the delivery. Affect not fine words, but words which the Holy Ghost teaches; that is, sound speech, which cannot be condemned. Enticing words of man's wisdom debase your matter. Gold needs not to be painted. Scripture expressions are what people are used to, and will remember. Consider the lambs of the flock. You must take them along with you. Do not over-drive them, by being over-long, or over-fine."—*Williams's Life of Matthew Henry*, p. 122.

"I advised him," said Mr. Cecil, "since he was so near his entrance into the ministry, to lay aside all other studies for the present, but the one I should now recommend to him. I would have him select some very poor and uninformed persons, and pay them a visit. His object should be to explain to them, and demonstrate to them the truth of the solar system. He should first of all set himself to make that system perfectly intelligible to them, and then he should demonstrate it to their full conviction against all that the followers of Tycho Brahe, or any one else could say against it. He would tell me it was impossible; they would not understand a single term. Impossible to make them astronomers! And shall it be thought an easy matter to make them understand redemption?"—*Cecil's Remains*, p. 42.

CHAPTER VII.

The Spirituality of the Ministry of Christ.

To form a correct estimate of the value of Christ as a teacher, some general idea must be entertained of the situation of the world previously to his advent. Nothing can be more humiliating to the pride of human wisdom than the scriptural account of this matter. Men "groped in the dark without light."[1]

If we look to that period, during which a succession of men under the special influence of the Holy Spirit communicated to their nation the word of the Lord, no adequate advantage will appear to have been derived by the people at large from such direct intimations of the divine will. The prophet Isaiah describes them as "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters." He stigmatizes those, whose duty it was to in-

[1] Job xii. 25.

struct and warn, as "blind watchmen,"—they were "all ignorant," "dumb dogs, they could not bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber."[2] The language of Jeremiah is equally strong in reproving the great corruption which the ecclesiastical state of Israel had suffered. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."[3] The Jewish church had their memorials of God before their eyes—"the tabernacle of testimony"[4]—"the tables of testimony"[5]—"the law and the testimony"[6]—but there were few who had not declined from the way of the Lord, and bowed the knee to Baal.

Proceeding from the prophetical times to the character of the world at the period of Christ's birth, we shall find a similar prevalence of iniquity. Zacharias, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, declared, that the "dayspring from on high had visited the people, to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death."[7] John bears testimony, that the light vouchsafed from above "shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."[8]

[2] Is. i. 4; lvi. 10.
[3] Jer. v. 30, 31.
[4] Exod. xxxviii. 21.
[5] Exod. xxxi. 18.
[6] Is. viii. 20.
[7] Luke i. 78, 79.
[8] John i. 5.

The deep moral degradation, which existed every where, and the wretched slavery by which men's minds were enthralled, are constantly represented under the figures of blindness and captivity, and night and death.[9] St. Paul, who enters into particulars with some minuteness, shews that these expressive images were not too strong to describe the ignorance or illustrate the disorders into which the heathen world had fallen. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." And again, he calls upon the converts to the truth to "walk henceforth, not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind; having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."[1] To such an extent were they misled by the delusions under which they laboured, that they mistook even the more obvious attributes of God, and confused in their minds

[9] See John xii. 40. 2 Tim. ii. 26. 1 Thess. v. 5. 1 John iii. 14.

[1] Rom. i. 21, 22. Eph. iv. 17, 18. See the whole of the striking description given of the heathen world in the first chapter of Romans; corroborated as it is by the unanimous testimony of profane writers, poets, satirists, and historians.

what related to the province of reason, as much as what belonged to the mysteries of revelation; they put evil for good, and good for evil, darkness for light, and light for darkness. St. Paul himself, though of the very strictest sect, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, "verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," while persecuting him in the persons of his followers. And when a change had been wrought in his mind through divine grace, and the errors which had obscured his understanding were removed, he received a commission from God to the Gentiles for the express purpose of "opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."[2] In the same spirit, and with the same view of the state of degradation in which the world was sunk, St. Peter exhorts the believers to "shew forth the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."[3]

But although scripture gives this humbling representation of the face of the world in a general view, it may be asked whether a remnant of a purer religion may not have been preserved among the philosophers of the more enlightened

[2] Acts xxvi. 9. 18.

[3] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

nations, previously to the promulgation of christianity?

It was certainly the wish of the early christians to enlist some of the pagan writers among the teachers of evangelical truths. And even in later times it has been insinuated, that "Plato began to write about the time when prophecy ceased; and that this was divinely contrived, in order to prepare the world for the gospel by an intermediate teaching of most of its principles."[4]

This suggestion is so far plausible, that it bears a close analogy to the mode, in which it has pleased God in general to communicate successive revelations of his will to mankind, after adequate gradual preparation. But when the grounds are examined upon which the hypothesis rests, there can be no doubt, that the amount of Plato's knowledge of the Deity has been greatly overrated, as well by those whose design it was to depreciate holy writ, as by those who have injudiciously wished to borrow for christianity the support and countenance of human wisdom. The supposed coincidence of Platonism with

[4] See *Dean Ireland's Paganism and Christianity compared*, p. 242, &c. and p. 323, for an able and judicious examination of the claim set up, by the admirers of Plato, to the introduction of a doctrine by that philosopher hardly inferior to the doctrine of Christ and the apostles. See also *Bp. Kaye's Ecclesiastical History*, &c. chap. iii.

revelation will vanish, when it is separated from the misrepresentations and additions of the followers of the Alexandrian school. Their object was to raise the character of philosophy by the secret aid of christianity, adopting scriptural expressions and ideas, and attributing them to Plato by means of artful interpretations and pretended similitudes of phrase.[5] On the whole, it may be safely concluded, even without having recourse to the testimony of revelation, that there was nothing attained by the wisest and best of that people, who erected an altar to the unknown God, which could supersede the necessity of divine teaching, or detract from the originality of our Lord as a preacher of spiritual truths.

Every thing, therefore, tends to confirm the unwelcome statement, which the scriptures so unequivocally assert, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." His counsels were "hidden from the wise and prudent."[6] Though he did not leave himself altogether without witness, and a few holy men, the salt of their times, an Enoch, or Noah, or Job, an Elijah, or a Daniel,

[5] Among these, Ammonius and Plotinus appear to have been most diligent in their insidious attempts. They were very successful in enlisting under their banners those who were sufficiently enlightened to be disgusted with the absurdities of polytheism, but yet continued adverse to christianity.

[6] 1 Cor. i. 21. Luke x. 21.

became the faithful depositaries of divine truth, and bare record in their several ages against the multitude who bowed the knee to Baal; yet false doctrine prevailed, and darkness was spread over the face of the land, and the earth was corrupt, as when God looked upon it of old, and "behold . . . . . all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."[7]

I. In the midst of this moral ignorance, of the grossest mistakes respecting the object and the nature of religion, that "true light" began to shine "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."[8] In pity to the corruptions that prevailed, Christ took upon himself the task of spiritualizing the worship paid to the Lord God, and gave a meaning and a purity to the precepts of the divine law, of which the traditions of the Jewish teachers had long deprived them. The preparatory dispensation under which man was taught to "live by sight,"[9] had proved inadequate to raise his affections to true holiness, and therefore in the fulness of time Christ came, the minister of a better covenant. For "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which

[7] Gen. vi. 12. [8] John i. 9.
[9] 2 Cor. v. 7.

is spiritual."[1] Hence it became a part of the office of that holy instructor to remove the errors of those who taught for doctrine the commandments of men, and to introduce a criterion of purity and perfection, of which the world had previously no conception.[2] Previously to his dispensation, darkness brooded over the face of the earth. He "brought to light" life and immortality.[3]

In fact, our Lord's discourses all tend to shew, that God, who is "a spirit," must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth;" and that we must not draw nigh and honour him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him.[4] But it was the special design of the longest of his recorded sermons to free the moral law from the glosses and traditions, with which those blind guides

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 46. "An appeal directed wholly to the better part, to the spirit of man—to motives, and hopes, and faculties of a character altogether *spiritual*, refined, and unseen—appears to have been reserved, until the *ministration of death* and condemnation, *put to proof, and found wanting*, might itself stand forth, in its wreck and insufficiency, an additional and most convincing argument, that *to live by sight* is not the way to conquer the perverse will, nor to bring the heart of man unto that *extent* of obedience and of purity, of which, even in this present life, God is pleased to make it capable." —*Miller's Bampton Lectures*, p. 41.

[2] Matt. v. vi. vii. xxiii. Mark vii. 1—13. Luke xvi. 18—22.

[3] 2 Tim. i. 10.

[4] John iv. 24. Matt. xv. 8.

had encumbered it, who, instead of being the guardians of the commandment once delivered to them, had become its corrupters. Considering it merely in this light, without any reference to its value as a manual of practical piety, it is of peculiar importance, as a model for a christian preacher, in its specification of the heavenly dispositions and graces, which, cultivated together, and maintained by daily renewals of the Holy Spirit, make "the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."[5] This is the moral superstructure, which it is the peculiar province of the gospel to establish on that foundation which is laid in Christ.

Indeed, were it necessary to single out any one particular excellence, as the characteristic feature of the sermon on the mount, it would seem to be spirituality, as distinguished from the lifeless and formal teaching of the scribes and expounders of the law. There is nothing in it but what is grave, edifying, important, befitting alike the character of the speaker, and the condition of the hearers. It comes stamped with all the official weight of a divine interpretation of divine precepts. It remains as the authorized exposition of the manner in which God intends his own word to be understood; and from the mode of instruction here adopted on those sub-

[5] 2 Tim. iii. 17.

jects into which our Lord enters, it is safe to reason analogically respecting the points on which revelation is silent.

Yet this discourse has met with a singular reception. Either its value in a general point of view, as a pattern of spiritual comment on the divine will, has been depreciated, owing to a misunderstanding of the circumstances under which it was delivered,—or it has been unduly magnified by an exclusive preference and veneration, to the detriment of other parts of holy scripture. While some, overlooking the fact that the apostles were not yet chosen from among the disciples, have considered its precepts addressed solely to the apostles, and binding on them alone; some, on the other hand, have denied that any doctrine or command which is not contained in it, can be obligatory on christians at large, or essential to be received by them.[6]

[6] "Some have asserted, that nothing more need be preached to the people than what the sermon on the mount contains; yet perhaps these very persons would not be willing that every part of this discourse should be closely pressed upon their consciences. Let us pay all possible deference and respect to every word of Jesus, and endeavour to enter into the full meaning and importance of this solemn address; but let us not presume to say, what some have absurdly and impiously maintained, that this alone is sufficient, as if every other portion of the scriptures might be safely expunged or disregarded."—*Robinson's Scripture Characters*, ii. 346.

This is not the place to inquire into the consequences arising from either of these errors; but it cannot be disputed that one of the greatest obligations which the world owes to Christ, considered merely in his office as a teacher, is the new criterion which he has afforded in this discourse for forming a true judgment on men and things,—the new touchstone which he has appointed for the trial of the human conduct, by spiritualizing the dispositions of the heart, and directing attention to propensities and motives, as well as to overt actions. Hence it has arisen, that there are certain moral precepts, as well as the sublimer doctrines of the gospel, which are derived exclusively from the page of revelation, and can be learnt through that medium alone.

The law of retaliation has been held allowable by all nations; and even the Mosaic code so far gave it sanction, as to introduce it as a principle of retributive justice. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, strife for strife."[7] But what is the language of the teacher come from God? "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

[7] Exod. xvi. 24. Levit. xxiv. 20. Deut. xix. 21.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."[8]

Again: the Jewish doctors sanctioned the indulgence of hatred, provided only it were cherished against an enemy—but the "exceeding broad commandment" of God, as it is well termed by the psalmist,[9] inculcates not the love of friends only, (a feeling which might be prompted by the innate affections of human nature even in its fallen state,) but the forgiveness and love even of our very foes and persecutors. "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."[1]

So too that "old commandment," which the Jews "had from the beginning," was so enlarged in respect of extent, by the better promises through which it was renewed, and the example given for its fulfilment, that our Lord does not hesitate to call it a "new commandment," though not actually so, either in letter or effect.[2]

To the same source, and to that alone, must be ascribed that preference of humility and lowliness to honour and distinction, inculcated throughout the gospel; as well as that injunction to repress an overweening affection for earthly

[8] Matt. v. 38—41. [9] Ps. cxix. 96. [1] Matt. v. 43—48.
[2] John xiii. 34, compared with 1 John ii. 7, 8.

objects, which is so contrary to the line of policy suggested by the wisdom of merely human instructors.[3]

The doctrines alluded to, the distinctive and peculiar doctrines of christian morality, emanated exclusively from him, who is the source of all spiritual life and knowledge; and ecclesiastical history supplies abundant examples of that purer tone of conduct, which the action of such heavenly-minded principles early introduced into social life. It was under such an influence, that the christians at Carthage came forward with alacrity at the call of Cyprian, to bury those who had died of the plague, when the pagans had an opportunity of contrasting the effects of the love of God with their own interested selfishness and inhumanity. "It was on this occasion," says Milner, "that the Lord stirred up the spirit of christians to shew the practical superiority of their religion . . . . . The rich contributed largely; the poor gave what they could; namely, their labour with extreme hazard of their lives; the pagans saw with astonishment the effects of the love of God in Christ."[4] The same historian remarks on another occasion, when Flavian, the aged and infirm bishop of Antioch, had undertaken a perilous

[3] 1 John ii. 15. James iv. 4.

[4] *Milner's Church History*, vol. i. p. 421.

journey to Constantinople, to plead with the emperor in behalf of his fellow-citizens who had been led into sedition, that even monks, who exhibited christianity in a degenerate form, exceeded in benevolence and active virtue the boasted and boasting sons of philosophy.[5]

Liberality to the poor was another happy fruit of our Lord's doctrines. This characteristic part of the practice of believers could only have had its origin in a religion which brings the whole race of mankind into one bond of union, whereby the world at large is taught to consider all men with brotherly love, and to do good to all without distinction of persons. "The Jews," says Milner, in his Church History, "were a very selfish, hard-hearted people; the Gentiles lived in luxury and splendour, if they could; but care for the poor seems to have made no part of their jurisprudence, nor to have been at all a fashionable virtue. I never could learn that philosophers,

[5] Vol. ii. 281. See also pp. 105. 283. 483. 517; and *Dean Ireland's Lectures*, pp. 113. 130. 206. Dionysius, speaking of the plague at Alexandria, bears similar testimony to the beneficial influence of christianity. "Many of our brethren, through their excessive love and brotherly affection, neglected themselves in consequence of their cleaving to one another." He remarks "with what affectionate care the christians attended the funerals of their friends; whilst the pagans in the same city, through fear of receiving the infection, deserted and neglected theirs."—*Cox's Lives of the Primitive Fathers.*

though they harangued incessantly concerning virtue, either much recommended or practised any kindness to the bulk of mankind,—that is, the slaves and vulgar. Indeed, their precepts are particularly directed to the higher ranks, and they seem to forget that the lower orders belonged to the human species. An hospital, an almshouse, or any similar provision for the poor, was unknown in the pagan and philosophic world. But when the religion of him who is no respecter of persons began to gain ground, the barbarous spirit of aristocracy lost its dominion among christians, though it still prevailed in the manners of the rest of mankind. Christians felt themselves all sinners—all in the sight of God on a level."[6]

II. But the spiritual character of our Lord shines in its brightest lustre, when brought into contrast with the slow comprehension and gross conceptions of those around him. No line of argument can shew more distinctly, that whoever comes to Christ as a teacher, will find himself more and more in need, at every step he takes, of that Holy Spirit which alone can help the infirmities of man in his natural ignorance.

The Jews, through the darkness of their understandings, continually mistook the meaning

[6] *Milner's Church History*, i. 519.

of our Lord's discourses, though delivered in language familiar to them by their own prophetical writings, and often abounding in allusions to their national prejudices and associations. We shall look in vain out of scripture for an explanation of the remarkable fact, that men, situated as were the scribes and teachers of the law, could attribute the words of truth and soberness, to the ravings of madness or the power of satanic influence. But the bible at once removes the difficulty; and, in a circumstance so contrary to all reasonable expectation, is seen nothing but a new and humiliating illustration of a truth for which we are indebted to revealed religion—that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[7]

Nor is it sufficient to allege that it was not given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; since the intentional obscurity in which our Lord often veiled his meaning, when discoursing in their presence of some of the deeper points of his doctrine, was a penal judgment inflicted for their wilful blindness. He had formerly spoken to them in the clearest manner; he had wrought miracles before their

[7] 1 Cor. ii. 14.

eyes to convince them of the source from which he derived his authority; his Father himself had commanded attention to his preaching by a voice from heaven;—but they had perverted their natural powers, and abused their external advantages, and therefore God withheld from them any further communication of knowledge, and judicially closed their ears against the report of the gospel. "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand; and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."[8]

It was owing to this desertion on the part of God, that the Jewish hearers of our Lord exhibit in the sacred history so awful a specimen of the native scepticism of the human heart when left to itself; and of the proud and unteachable spirit of man, unenlightened by divine grace. Even Nicodemus, the most candid of them, and

[8] Matt. xiii. 13—15.

sincerely desirous of knowing what was truth, was not entirely exempt from the prejudice of his countrymen; as is shewn by his incredulity respecting the doctrine of the new birth.[9] The burthens derived from tradition with which their religious worship was encumbered,—their mistaken notions[1] respecting the Messiah's kingdom

[9] John iii. 4.

[1] It may be sufficient to hint briefly at a few of these misconceptions, of which traces may be perceived in scripture. The Jews believed from Dan. vii. 13, 14, that Christ would descend visibly from heaven, and destroy the Roman power, —an idea alluded to Matt. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. Rom. x. 6. 1 Cor. i. 22. They believed from Dan. ii. 44, that Christ would abide with them for ever; see John xii. 34. Luke xxiv. 21. Rom. x. 7.—from Isa. lx. 3, that the Gentiles would be enlightened with the knowledge of the true God by the Jews converting them to Judaism—refuted by St. Paul, Gal. iii. 16.—from Jer. xxxi. 35, that all Israel should have their part in the world to come, Luke xiii. 22.—from Gen. xlix. 10, 11, and Isa. xxi. 12, that Israel should be saved, and the other nations of the world destroyed by the Messiah, refuted John iii. 17.—from a misapplication of Isa. lxv. 13, that they should live with the Messiah in the garden of Eden. The Jews also maintained that Elias would come in his own person. Hence our Lord says, with reference to the inveteracy of this prejudice, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come."—Matt. xi. 14. More immediately with reference to our Lord himself, they believed that he should be born at Bethlehem, and remain concealed till Elias should come to anoint him; or at least that his parentage should be unknown, John vii. 27.—that he should immediately

and person,—the low and unworthy interpretations which they put on the figurative language of their scriptures,—their contempt for every thing that was not Jewish, and their obstinate rejection of whatever was opposed to their own prejudices, national or private,—all originated in want of spirituality, and proved the justice of our Lord's charge, that they were earthly in their conceptions and natures.

Not unfrequently, indeed, the perverseness of their misapprehensions would appear to savour of puerile simplicity, rather than of mere ignorance. When Christ enforced the necessity of "eating his flesh," and "drinking his blood," they understood him to speak in a literal sense of his natural body, and asked, "How can this

accomplish peace on earth, Luke xii. 49—51.—that he could not be a man, John v. 18; x. 33. 1 John v. 5. Mark xiv. 61.—that he should not be in a mean condition, but should have a temporal kingdom, Mark xv. 31.—that he should not be born of a woman in the helpless state of an infant, John vii. 27.—that he should not be subject to the miseries incidental to man,—and, on the other hand, that he should be a mere man of the stock and lineage of David, and not the Son of God, refuted by our Lord himself, Luke xx. 41. Such is a sample of the absurdities and contradictions, into which those fell who were left through their own perverseness to a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. On the subject of the prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, see *Jortin's Discourses concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion*, Discourse i.

man give us his flesh to eat?"[2] When he taught them that one of the privileges of his disciples consisted in spiritual freedom from sin, they conceived he meant freedom from civil servitude, and retorted upon him, that "Abraham's seed were never in bondage to any man."[3] When he declared, that those who kept his sayings should never see death, they accused him of madness for promising his followers exemption from the common lot of mankind, and interpreted his words to imply a temporal privilege, which not even their federal father, the head of their nation, had been suffered to enjoy.[4] When he spoke of withdrawing himself to a place whither they would not be able to follow him, however much their approaching miseries might tend to make them desire it, their minds were so engrossed with this present world, that they scornfully inquired, whether he meant to "kill himself?" because he said, "whither I go ye cannot come."[5] Well might our Saviour be moved with compassion for the people, "because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd," while the very masters of Israel knew not the Lord's anointed, and cast the spirit of his doctrines behind them.[6]

[2] John vi. 52—58. [3] John viii. 32—36.
[4] John viii. 51—59. [5] John viii. 21—24.
[6] Matt. ix. 36.

But it may be objected, that though the Jews at large exhibited so much blindness, yet the more immediate followers and disciples of Jesus received his instructions in so different a manner, that an especial blessing is pronounced on them for the superior intelligence and heavenly-mindedness which they displayed. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."[7]

Yet, if the apostles rise in our estimation, when brought into comparison with the rebellious and stiff-necked people, who believed none of the truths of the gospel; how little will their highest attainments bear to be contrasted with him to whom the Spirit was not given by measure! How often must he have mourned in secret, like St. Paul over the Corinthians,[8] that he could not speak to them as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal! How often must he have prayed his heavenly Father to give them the spirit of wisdom and grace, that they "might be filled with all spiritual understanding!"[9] How must his soul have been vexed from day to day, while they were fools and slow of heart to believe, and filled with perplexities and doubts at all that they saw and heard! How must he have sorrowed at the number of those, who

[7] Matt. xiii. 16. [8] 1 Cor. iii. 1.

[9] Col. i. 9.

were offended at his hard sayings, and desisted from their attendance on him!

Hence it is, that Christ frequently complains of the ignorance in spiritual matters with which he had to contend, even amongst his disciples. "He saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also?" "Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? having eyes see ye not, and having ears hear ye not? and do ye not remember?" "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"[1] And, even after his resurrection, he had occasion to upbraid the eleven "with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them that had seen him after that he was risen."[2] Their astonishment at every renewed display of Christ's power shewed how little conviction had been wrought upon their minds by the many signs and wonders they had witnessed. Their prejudices were rather vanquished, in spite of themselves, by the accumulation of irresistible proofs of his divine authority, than subdued at once by the durable and convincing impression of some individual miracle. On the evening of the very day when our Lord had fed the multitude of five thousand with five loaves, his disciples were

[1] Mark vii. 18; viii. 17, 18; ix. 19. [2] Mark xvi. 14.

"sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered" at the manifestation of his power on the winds and the sea. "For," says the evangelist, "they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened."[3] And in nothing perhaps was their dulness more conspicuously manifested, than in their fear of asking from their Lord explanations of what they did not understand.[4]

The faith of the disciples was equally staggered by some of our Saviour's doctrines. On his declaring the difficulty with which the rich should be saved, "they were exceedingly amazed," and seem to have thought this truth incredible, because it was so repugnant to their worldly conceptions.[5] In particular, the prophetical declarations respecting the Messiah proved to them a trying stumbling-block. They were slow to perceive how these predictions were accomplished in their master, till, after his glorification, their minds had been gradually opened, according to promise,[6] by the teaching of the Comforter. "These things understood not his disciples at the first; but, when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him."[7]

[3] Mark vi. 52. [4] See Mark ix. 32. Luke ix. 45.
[5] Matt. xix. 25. [6] John xiv. 26; xvi. 15.
[7] John xii. 16.

In fact, that very insight, which the apostles gained into their master's dispensation after his death, shewed how much they had previously stood in need of being quickened to a spiritual apprehension of the nature of the service in which they had engaged. The true meaning of many actions, which they had witnessed in ignorance or misconception, was then cleared up, according to the assurance given to them—"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."[8] Thus it was with our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, sitting on an ass's colt.[9] Thus it was with his prediction respecting the temple of his body,[1] and with the washing the disciples' feet.[2] Thus also at the last supper, when our Lord, having dipped the sop, and given it to Judas, addressed him so significantly at the table, "no man" at that time "knew for what intent he spake this unto him;"[3] but afterwards, when "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"[4] had been poured out upon the apostles, the full import of these remarkable words occurred to their minds in all its force, as indicative of our Saviour's perfect knowledge of the sufferings he was to un-

[8] John xiii. 7. See also xvi. 4.
[9] John xii. 16.
[1] John ii. 22, compared with Luke xxiv. 6—8.
[2] John xiii. 6—10.
[3] John xiii. 28.
[4] Eph. i. 17.

dergo, and of the steady composure with which he contemplated them.

During the transfiguration, when three of the disciples were selected to be the witnesses of this sublime manifestation of the glory to which their Lord was to be exalted, they so far mistook the intention of the display, that Peter, not knowing what he said, and ignorant that the sacrifice was not yet offered on which the redemption of the world depended, would have detained our Saviour from going down again from the mount to meet the sufferings which, before he could enter into his state of glorification, it behoved him to bear.[5]

It was the same defective view of Christ's dignity which induced Philip to ask, after having been so long conversant with his character and pretensions- -"Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father?"[6] The apostle might have remembered that the sight of God visibly did not "suffice" his forefathers of old; for after such a privilege they "corrupted themselves, and made a molten image."[7] And well might his

[5] Luke ix. 33. [6] John xiv. 8, 9.

[7] Deut. ix. 12.

Lord, whom Philip at his first interview had acknowledged as the Messias,[8] complain of the slow progress of his disciple in the discernment of heavenly things, when he could desire a sensible manifestation of that which is in its essence spiritual.

John is looked upon as the apostle of love; and the affectionate expressions with which his epistles abound, evidently flow from a heart full of tenderness and christian charity for his brethren in the bonds of the gospel. Jerome mentions of him, that, in extreme old age, being carried to church at Ephesus in the arms of the disciples, and unable to preach at any length, he was in the habit of repeating always the same words, "Little children, love one another."[9] He was very defective in the grace which he inculcated so earnestly, at the time when he would have called down fire from heaven on the city of the Samaritans, and forbad the man to cast out devils because he followed not with Christ.[1] But the disciple whom Jesus loved imbibed largely of his master's spirit of good-will towards men, as he lay in his bosom, and learnt that "if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."[2]

Even in one of the last discourses which our

8 John i. 45.

9 *Lardner's Credibility*, &c. vol. v. p. 42.

1 Luke ix. 49. 54. 2 Matt. ix. 38. 1 John. iv. 11.

Saviour held with his disciples, the candour of the evangelist informs us of three gross misapprehensions of his meaning.[3] Their minds were far from being yet fixed on heavenly things, when they believed on the temporal kingdom of the Messiah—contended amongst themselves for precedency in it—and remained ignorant of the necessity of the death and passion of him whose hour was come, and who was already on his way to Jerusalem, with the cross, and all the sufferings that awaited him there, full in his view.

In fact, it was against the disciples, that some of our Lord's strongest rebukes were directed. Besides his reproof of Peter, hereafter to be noticed, "he turned and rebuked" James and John for want of meekness, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."[4] So too he had said before, doubtless partly with reference to the unbelief of his disciples, which disabled them from casting out an evil spirit from a lunatic, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?"[5] On another occasion he was "much displeased" with them, because they would not suffer the little children to come unto him; and intimated, that

[3] Matt. xx. 17—28. [4] Luke ix. 55.
[5] Luke ix. 41.

with such, rather than with those who forbad them, was the kingdom of heaven peopled.[6]

It seems, indeed, not unreasonable to suppose, that the contradiction of sinners formed a principal ingredient in our Saviour's cup of misery.[7] In proportion as he was spiritual himself, he would feel more acutely the want of a corresponding sentiment in the hearts of his hearers. His devotion to his Father's service would render him peculiarly alive to the guilt of those who obstructed by their obstinate unbelief the progress of his kingdom,—his intimate acquaintance with his Father's will would fill him with sorrow for the ignorance in which the world was lying,—and his knowledge that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, would lead him to view with mingled pity and indignation the hypocritical and formal homage which had been substituted in the place of the inward circumcision of the heart. The real agony of the cross was not the nails and piercing, not the vinegar mingled with gall and the giving up the ghost; but the profane mockings of the soldiers and the deridings of the rulers, the de-

[6] Mark x. 13—15.

[7] See particularly the series of ensnaring questions put to our Lord in a single day, Matt. xxii. 15—46.

spising and rejecting of men, and the "shame and spitting."[8]

The manner in which our Lord vindicated the sanctity of the temple from the mercenary business by which it had been profaned, especially when contrasted with the general meekness of his character, shewed how he was "grieved when he beheld the transgressors, because they kept not God's word."[9] No warmth which he displayed ever arose from merely personal feelings. We read only once of Christ's anger.[1] Though his righteous soul was vexed day by day with ungodly deeds, yet he possessed his spirit in patience, and the reproaches addressed to himself were left unregarded and unanswered,—or, if it were necessary to refute such slanders as would have prejudiced the success of his ministry, it was done in a spirit of gentleness forming the best comment on his own declaration, that "he sought not his own glory."[2] But the case was different, when, like David, he was zealous for the house of God.[3] "When he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money,

[8] Is. l. 6.
[9] Ps. cxix. 158.
[1] Mark iii. 5.
[2] John viii. 50.
[3] Ps. cxxxii. 1—10.

and overthrew the tables."[4] Many circumstances concurred to give a very remarkable character to this scene. It was the first passover which Jesus attended after entering upon his public ministry; and therefore the earliest opportunity of vindicating with authority his Father's honour, and purging the temple of some of its external corruptions. He had often witnessed these scenes before, on the occasion of his periodical visits to Jerusalem with his parents, in obedience to the law. But his hour had not then come. He had not entered on his public character as a prophet. The evangelist records that, when the disciples saw this unusual ebullition of warmth on the part of their master, they "remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."[5] And, doubtless, the Jewish priests remembered also the memorable words of the last of their own prophets. "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple. . . . . And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."[6]

If our Lord's nature revolted thus instinc-

[4] John ii. 15—17. See a second manifestation of the same spirit of holy indignation, Matt. xxi. 12, 13.

[5] John ii. 17. Ps. lxix. 9.

[6] Mal. iii. 1—3.

tively from whatever had the least tendency to unholiness, how must he have felt the humiliation to which he was subjected, when abandoned in the wilderness to the temptation of the devil! If he was moved with such holy indignation at the sight of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees; if he wept through the bitterness of his sympathy over misguided Jerusalem; if he was "troubled in spirit" at the thought of his betrayal by an apostle;[7] how must his soul have been grieved when he heard the eternal enemy of the human race, the author of all their miseries, assaulting his ear with blasphemies, and summoning up with deadly though impotent rage all his artifices, to exert them in one last effort against the incarnate son of God himself! Perhaps too we may conclude from the expression of one of the evangelists,—"then the devil departed from him for a season"[8]—that these attacks were renewed at a moment, when, from the view of his approaching sufferings, our Lord's human frame would be least enabled to contend with them, and that the assaults of Satan formed a principal part of his moral trial during the agony in the garden. The abhorrence with which our Saviour turned from the evil suggestions of his enemy, is strongly marked in the indignant rebuke which he uttered on a subse-

[7] John xiii. 21. [8] Luke iv. 13.

quent occasion to Peter, when that apostle shewed that he had no proper value for spiritual things. "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."[9]

III. There is another consideration which may be suggested, as contributing to place our Lord's spirituality in a strong light.

The multitudes who formed his occasional audiences were struck with nothing more than with the edifying nature of his discourses. They "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." "Many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him?"[1] They contrasted, greatly to the disadvantage of their own privileged instructors, the serious and heavenly tendency of his doctrine, with the vain and wretched trifling, which distinguished the conversation of the doctors of the law. "Never man spake like this man."[2] On one occasion our Lord declares the cause of this difference in a very pointed manner, and shews that by a kind of moral impossibility, they could not speak good and holy

9 Matt. xvi. 23.

1 Luke iv. 22. Mark vi. 2.

2 John vii. 46.

things to which their hearts were strangers. "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh? A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things."[3]

But on the part of our Lord, whether discoursing with his disciples, or with the people, or with the Pharisees, his topics were always chosen with reference to the object of his ministry. The disciples were enlightened by more intimate communication of the secret purposes which he was sent to fulfil—the people were exhorted to repent and receive the Messiah—the Pharisees were warned to flee from the wrath to come. Instead of settling trivial disputes, or deciding subtle questions, or gratifying speculative curiosity, he taught the nature of universal righteousness towards God and man, —the true principles of holiness,—the connexion between the doctrines of the new covenant and the practice of believers,—the method of reconciliation between God and man,—the obligations of the redeemed to have their "conversation in heaven, from whence also they looked for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."[4]

To appreciate the excellence of the teaching of Christ, these sublime and spiritual topics

[3] Matt. xii. 34, 35. [4] Phil. iii. 20.

should be compared with the defective philosophy of the heathens, or with the absurdities and immoralities of the Koran, or even with the preparatory dispensation revealed to the Israelites, and committed to their keeping. Our Lord had good reason for saying, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."[5]

The excellence of the Jewish law was indeed justly extolled by Moses. "This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. . . . . And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day."[6] Yet we know that the higher mysteries of Christ's kingdom were shrouded from their view, like the face of their lawgiver himself,[7] under a vail of figures and metaphors. The sight which Moses obtained of God was purposely rendered dark and indistinct—he saw as it were only "his back parts."[8] And yet the acquaintance with the divine mysteries enjoyed by him and by the prophets, was much more explicit than what was vouchsafed to the Jewish nation at large; so that the religious knowledge

[5] John vi. 63.
[6] Deut. iv. 6—8.
[7] Ex. xxxiv. 33.
[8] 1 Kings iv. 33.

of the people was far from being on a level with the views entertained by the inspired writers themselves. The Jews, as a people, knew little of the nature of God, of the plan of acceptance with him, or of a future state of rewards and punishments.

But since the manifestation of the true light, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." "Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house, hath more honour than the house."[9] As Matthew Henry says, contrasting the grace of the New Testament with the old dispensation, "the Spirit is now more fully 'poured' out. Then the house was filled with glory; but now the earth is filled with glory."[1]

Nor should it be forgotten, that the spirituality of our Lord was manifested in his practice, as well as in precept.

Before he entered on his public ministry, Satan was permitted to make trial of the nature

[9] 2 Cor. iv. 6. Heb. viii. 6; iii. 3.

[1] *Williams's Life of Matthew Henry*, p. 154.

of his self-devotion. "All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them . . . . . will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan."[2] The same feeling was evinced in his conveying himself away from the multitude who would have made him a king;[3] and in the manner in which he profited by the remarks of the disciples on the stones of the temple, the beauty of which they had pointed out to him.[4] But Christ, as Fenelon remarks, had seen his Father's house; and could not, therefore, be taken with the glory of the earthly structure. He seizes the opportunity of leading their minds from the admiration of its exterior splendour, to contemplate the certainty of its approaching destruction. "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down." Such was the holy consistency of him, who, when he gave us a command that we should walk as he walked, left us an example, at the same time, that we should follow his steps.

This subject suggests important practical inferences.

1. The ministers and stewards of Christ's mysteries have need daily to pray their Lord, that

[2] Matt. iv. 8—10. [3] John vi. 15.
[4] Matt. xxiv. 1, 2.

the "same mind may be in them, which was also in Christ Jesus."[5] The question of our Saviour to Nicodemus—"Art thou a master of Israel, (or, as it should rather be, "the master, the famous master,") and knowest not these things?"[6]—teaches the responsibility which attaches to the clergy in this respect. They are to be notorious, as living epistles of Christ, to be read of all men. It is expected of them, beyond all others, that they should not be ignorant of those spiritual truths (for it is to them that the context in John particularly refers) which the revelation of the gospel has disclosed to man, and which they are set apart for the especial purpose of enforcing. It was the disciples who were "first of all" warned against hypocrisy.[7]

The want of spirituality which pervaded the whole Romish church, was one of the motives which influenced our protestant reformers in separating from that church. Fox's description, in his account of Wiclif, of the corrupt state of religion, is very striking. "The onely name of Christ remaineth among christians, but his true and lively doctrine was as farre unknown unto the most part, as his name was common unto all men. As touching faith, consolation, the end

[5] Phil. ii. 5.

[6] John iii. 10. ὁ διδασκαλὸς. See Bishop Middleton *in loc.*

[7] Luke xii. 1.

and use of the law, the office of Christ, of our impotence and weaknesse, of the Holy Ghost, of the greatnesse and strength of sinne, of true works, of grace and free justification by faith, of libertie of a christian man, wherein consisteth and resteth the summe and matter of our profession; there was no mention, nor any word almost spoken. Scripture learning and divinitie was knowne but unto a few, and that in the scholes onely, and these also turned and converted almost all into sophistry. Instead of Peter and Paul, men occupied their time in studying Aquinas and Scotus, and the master of sentences. The world, leaving and forsaking the lively power of God's spirituall word and doctrine, was altogether led and blinded with outward ceremonies and humane traditions, wherein the whole scope, in a manner, of all christian perfection did consist and depend. In these was all the hope of obtaining salvation fullie fixed; hereunto all things were attributed. Insomuch, that scarcely any other thing was seene in the temples or churches, taught or spoken of in sermons, or finallie intended or gone about in their whole life, but only heaping up of certaine shadowed ceremonies upon ceremonies, neither was there any end of their heaping."[8]

Our own church has been formerly charged

[8] *Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. i. 7.

with remissness in this matter. Leighton, says Bishop Burnet, thought the church of England looked like the fair carcase of a body without a spirit—without that zeal, that strictness of life, and that laboriousness in the clergy, that became them.[9] This made him study to excite in his clergy a greater sense of spiritual feelings and of the care of souls. In another place, where Burnet bears witness to the learning and labours of the reformed pastors, he laments the decay of the vitals of christianity.[1] Indeed, the whole account of his own times presents a melancholy picture of the prevailing temper of the English clergy in his day. Political sourness seems to have been the characteristic of the church. Parties ran so high during these unsettled times, that it would have been difficult, perhaps, for any body of men to have prevented the intrusion of secular feelings and partialities into the sacred office. Milner, with much justice, has compared this period with the state of the primitive church, from the death of Dionysius to the end of the third century.[2] In both these periods there was the same declension in spiritual feeling, the same prevalence of private animosities, the same unsubdued love of the world, accompanied with much learning and external morality in the

[9] *Hist. of His Own Times*, i. 589. [1] *Id.* i. 687; ii. 638.
[2] *Church History*, i. 501.

public ministrations of the pastors. He whose lot is cast in times when the succession is undisputed, has great reason to be thankful that Providence has exempted him from the entanglements of disturbed nations, whenever he reflects on the struggles for ecclesiastical power—the unchristian hatred shewn no less to the persons than to the doctrines of papists and dissenters—the want of cordiality even among the members of the same church—which so shamefully distinguished the clergy about the period of the Revolution.

But the failings of the fathers may at least serve to teach their children wisdom. They may remind those who have the charge of the flock of Christ, to examine well the state of their spiritual affections; and to see whether they are animated by that deep sense of the importance of religious truth, which can alone produce a corresponding impression on their people. The experience of all who are acquainted with the nature of parochial ministrations, will agree in the necessity of labouring to excite a serious spirit in a congregation, without which even increased knowledge and purer morality are but unsatisfactory proofs of a real progress in vital religion. A consistent delivery of the doctrines of the gospel is essentially requisite to the formation and gradual development of christian principles; but it must be

accompanied by many an earnest prayer for the effusion of some portion of that divine grace, which, in primitive times, added to the church in one day three thousand souls.[3] Knowledge, if not rightly directed, and rendered influential, becomes destructive. Its inutility for the advancement of true religion was never more strongly exemplified than in the times of the Commonwealth. The really useful person in winning souls to Christ, is he who is so penetrated with the value of the doctrines of the gospel, as to persuade by the zeal and sincerity of his manner, when a less earnest mode of teaching would have failed to convince. When prejudices are to be overcome, or ignorance to be removed, it is necessary first to shew, that the man who labours to introduce new modes of feeling and thinking is not only the convert of his own opinions, but an example himself of their practical efficacy in forming a spiritual character.

2. It is clear, that the giver of a law so spiritual as that which Christ promulgated, must himself expect to be served with a spiritual obedience. "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."[4] They must be

[3] Acts ii. 41. [4] John iv. 23.

not of the world, even as he was not of the world.[5]

We are commanded not to approach God with "carnal sacrifices," but "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."[6] And if this caution were necessary in the apostolical age, it seems to be much more seasonable in the present state of the christian world. Men are liable to particular defects in particular situations. During the first ages of christianity, when the new religion was embraced by a small part of the population, and its followers were obliged to meet together secretly for fear of their opponents, their numbers were not likely to be swelled by any who were not prepared to prefer the service of God to the indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, and to renounce their worldly interests for the sake of the gospel. "Religious profession," said Mr. Cecil, "was at first a conflict—a sacrifice: now it has become a trade."[7] But when martyrdom is the price paid for adherence to religious opinions, the danger will not be incurred on light grounds, or by unstable and fickle characters. "In the first beginnings of christianity," says Bishop Burnet, "no man could reasonably think of taking orders, unless he had in him the spirit of martyrdom."[8]

[5] John xvii. 16.
[6] 1 Pet. ii. 5
[7] *Remains*, p. 215.
[8] *Pastoral Care.*

But the case is different in a country where christianity is the law of the land, and where the disabilities and penalties, if any exist, are levelled against dissent from the current belief. It may then be feared, that, even where two or three are gathered together, motives of a less pure and disinterested nature may have contributed to their assembling, than influenced the disciples, when they met by stealth and at the hazard of their lives in the secrecy of an upper chamber.[9] Perhaps too stated services, however necessary for the maintenance of true religion, may have a tendency to produce in some minds a cold and formal worship. They may "have well said all that they have spoken," without experiencing a fulfilment of God's own gracious wish—"O that there were such an heart in them!"[1]

Yet, if these be evils inseparable from what forms in other respects our happiest blessing and privilege, it is incumbent on us to guard, as far as possible, against their injuring the spirituality of our character. As we recede farther from the apostolical times, we must pray for more abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit, that a lively feeling of religion may be renewed, and the draft of christianity restored to its original purity, wherever the lapse of ages has insensibly suffered it to decline. Almost every century since the

[9] John xx. 19, with Acts i. 13. [1] Deut. v. 28, 29.

promulgation of the gospel has had its own corrupters of the truth. The Judaizing teachers, the Platonists, and the Peripatetics, have in turn tampered with the oracles of God. Even Mosheim, who is certainly not inclined to depreciate the value of human reasoning, doubts whether the interests of true religion did not lose something by the accession of the philosophers and scholars, who were converted in the course of the second century.[2] The simplicity of truth, unadorned with "enticing words of man's wisdom,"[3] began through their means to be gradually corrupted; and a false taste was introduced into religion, little calculated to elevate the heart, and fix its desires on heavenly things. We must quicken our affections by frequent meditation on the astonishing love of God—we must enliven and promote the fervency of our devotions by a deep conviction of the indispensable necessity of seeking through prayer the assistance of divine grace, so that, like Simeon, we too may "come by the Spirit" as it were "into the temple"[4]—we must purify ourselves daily with renewed zeal and humiliation, that our hearts may become fit temples for the reception of the Holy Spirit. We must search the disposition, and try the tempers of our souls, lest there be any wickedness in them, which, however it may elude the

[2] Mosheim, i. 126. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 4. [4] Luke ii. 27.

notice of man, will not escape the detection of him, who knoweth the very secrets of our hearts, and spieth out all our ways. We must pray, that he, to whom the preparations of the heart belong, may continue his grace until the end; so that "the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him,"[5] may be sustained perpetually by spiritual life from above, and made perfect in every good work.

3. Scripture strongly inculcates that the spirituality of our minds is the test of their true christian character "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[6] And again, in another place, the gospel itself under which we live, is called, by a particular distinction, "the ministration of the Spirit."[7]

Each individual, therefore, is required to ascertain for himself, by serious self-examination, whether he is walking worthy of his calling in this respect. A worldly state of mind is not less destructive of true holiness than gross sin. The heart is so deceitful, that it requires continual watching, lest it be corrupted willingly; and, at the same time, it is often so weak, that there is need of no less caution, lest it be led astray

[5] Col. iii. 10. [6] Rom. viii. 9, 14.
[7] 2 Cor. iii. 8.

unawares. Now heavenly-mindedness, in the full sense of the word, includes a subjection of every thought to the will of God—the surrender of the affections to him—a deliberate preference of an eternal good to temporal advantages—purity of intention—abstraction from the world in the scriptural sense of the term—separation from low and secular ends—in a word, the daily remembrance of that work, which, though it can only be perfected in another state of being, must have its commencement here in the union of the soul with God; or, as it is so well termed by Scougal, "the life of God in the soul of man."

None who have this object in view will rest satisfied with low attainments in spirituality. They will bear in mind that comprehensive sentence of St. John—"Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[8] And if in the apostolical age it appeared necessary to exhort believers to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure,"[9] it cannot now be thought unreasonable to remind every one that hath in him a hope of salvation, that, as it was said of Christ himself that he waxed daily and grew in stature, so should the follower of Christ aspire after progressive communications of the Spirit, till he "come in the

[8] 1 John iii. 3. [9] 2 Pet. i. 10.

unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."[1]

And since, in proportion as we recede from the earliest ages of christianity, we become more liable to deviate from the simplicity of primitive truth, the state of our affections and the integrity of our belief must be tried by the balance of the sanctuary. The spirit that is in us must be put to the test, to see whether it be of Christ; or whether it has suffered debasement in that necessary connexion which every one must hold with men of worldly temper, in the course of his secular pursuits. "The world," writes the late Mr. Legh Richmond, "is a deadly enemy to spiritual attainment; you cannot too soon see the high importance of being less conformed to it, in all its vanities, vices, follies, and unprofitable waste of time, gifts, and talents. The christian will appear even in the simplicity of every personal ornament. The dress, the countenance, the tone of voice, the address, will lose its former levity, and in the minutest trifles of common life you will see the hand of God leading to important events, and his finger pointing to the life that is to come."[2] We must weigh well the full force and import of those remark-

[1] Eph. iv. 13.

[2] *Life*, 106.

able scriptural expressions which denote spiritual communion with God. Enoch and Noah "walked with God." Zacharias and Elizabeth were "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the law blameless." "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? .... as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "They that are after the Spirit, do mind the things of the Spirit." "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."[3]

All these texts shew the nature of which those must partake, whose "fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."[4] They present a high and holy standard of spiritual attainments, the fruits of grace, through the divine blessing on much prayer and watchfulness and self-examination. For, the more we meditate on them, and on the whole tenor of Christ's spiritual character, the more we shall learn practically, by the contrast which our own hearts

[3] Gen. v. 24; vi. 9. Luke i. 6. 2 Cor. vi. 14. 16. Rom. viii. 5. 9; xiii. 14. Eph. iii. 19. Phil. ii. 5.

[4] 1 John i. 3.

exhibit, how much man has fallen from the image of God, and how much our natures must be changed and elevated and purified, before we can be holy as he is holy, and perfect as he is perfect.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Tenderness of Christ's Ministry.

The character of the Mosaic dispensation was of a nature highly penal. All its institutions were rendered effective by the enactment of proportional punishments to which transgressors became liable; and the sentences carried into execution on Nadab and Abihu, on those who were joined to Baal-peor, on the worshippers of the golden calf, on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and on the blasphemer and sabbath-breaker, are sufficient to shew that whoever violated the known stipulation of the law, was actually subjected to all its rigours.[1] "As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses."[2] And though a tres-

[1] Ex. xxxii. Lev. x. xxiv. 10—16. Numb. xv. 32—36; xxv.

[2] Rom. ii. 12. Heb. x. 28.

pass-offering was permitted to be made for lesser transgressions, yet the disabilities under which the offenders laboured for a time, and the burthensome nature of the ceremonies by which they were restored to legal purification, would strongly tend to inspire a feeling of preference for a new covenant of love, which would supersede the pains and penalties of the Mosaic code.[3] What the spirit of that code was, may be collected from the confession of St. Paul; who, having been brought up in its principles at the feet of Gamaliel, and of the strictest sect, a Pharisee, designates it, when under the light of the better dispensation, a "ministration of condemnation" and "death" "which gendered to bondage."[4] Indeed the circumstances under which the law was delivered are strikingly descriptive of the character of the whole dispensation. They that heard the voice "intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; (for they could not endure that which was commanded. And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.")[5]

The christian dispensation is essentially different in all respects. Its distinctive characters

[3] Lev. iv. vi. xii. xv. &c. [4] Gal. iv. 24. 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.
[5] Heb. xii. 19—21.

are mercy and love. Its very name proclaims the glad tidings of the new covenant, and prepares an expectation of something more suitable to the necessities of man, than the world had experienced under the law of Moses. Nor are these hopes disappointed, when its gracious terms are revealed by the divine prophet of the church. The very foundation of the whole system represents the Father as "reconciling the world unto himself" by the death of his Son—"the enmity abolished"—"the curse of the law" taken away —believers "justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses," —comforted with "joy unspeakable," and filled with a "peace which passeth all understanding."[6] The whole scheme of the gospel, conceived and executed as a pledge of the divine love to man, is from first to last a scheme of tenderness and mercy. It provides for those, who require the fostering care of some arm strong enough to help them in their hour of need—it gives light to the spiritually blind—liberty to the captives under the yoke of Satan—life to the dead in trespasses and sin. In a word, "by the bringing in of a better hope,"[7] the ministry which was established under the new economy became

[6] 2 Cor. v. 19. Eph. ii. 15. Gal. iii. 13. Acts xiii. 39. 1 Pet. i. 8. Phil. iv. 7.

[7] Heb. vii. 19.

known by the cheering title of the "ministry of reconciliation;" and its members were charged to deliver, as the peculiar message of their divine master and head, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" for it—and "hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ," —and "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."[8]

It would have been highly inconsistent with such a dispensation, if its promulgator had not been distinguished for tender and compassionate feelings; or had God, in proclaiming it, displayed himself again to the world in the same overwhelming manner, which had formerly caused the Israelites to intreat that the word should not be spoken to them any more, if accompanied by the same terrible appearances. "Let not God speak unto us, lest we die." "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die."[9] The difference between the spirit of the old and of the new dispensation cannot be better marked, than by comparing 2 Kings i. 10—12, with Luke ix. 54—56. In the one case the two apostles are rebuked for making a proposal so much at variance with the saving purposes of their master's mission. In the

[8] John iii. 16. 2 Cor. v. 19. Eph. i. 3.

[9] Ex. xx. 19. Deut. v. 25. Compare *Bryant on the Authenticity of the Scriptures,* chap. ii.

other, the prophet's invocation of divine vengeance on the messengers of the king of Samaria is twice followed by the immediate descent of fire from heaven to consume them. Such is the difference between the law which "gendereth to bondage,"[1] and the gospel of love. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."[2]

God therefore sent his Son, clothed in all the gentle attributes which could attract or conciliate, and announced, by a proclamation of peace on earth, good-will towards men. He came not as a mighty conqueror; not as a king or judge, invested with the pomp and authority of human power; but meek, and lowly, and humble, the prince of peace, the saviour of mankind, the deliverer from the dominion of Satan and the sentence of death. He came not with his rod and sword, the emblems of judgment, to take vengeance; but bearing his cross, and bowed down under the weight of the iniquities of his people, which the decree of his Father had laid upon him. He came not accompanied with all those terrific signs which attended the giving of the law; but with miracles of a mild and beneficent nature, attesting at once the divinity of his mission, and marking its object as a mission of mercy. He came, in short, fulfilling that beautiful feature in his prophetical character which

[1] Gal. iv. 24. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 6.

was foretold by Isaiah—"A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench."[3]

That the full value of our Lord's assumption of human nature under these gracious circumstances might be manifested to the world in the strongest light, it was wisely ordained that the habits and manners of his forerunner should be of a diametrically opposite character.

Every thing about John's outward demeanour and appearance was studiously plain and austere; and to denote the rigour of his separation from the ordinary habits of mankind, he was a Nazarite from his birth; drinking neither wine nor strong drink; and subject in a more than common degree to all the severities of the order. By the direction of the angel a name was given him which none of his kindred had borne; forewarning them as it were that they must not expect to experience from him that interchange of domestic society, which passes between relations. For there is reason to believe, from an expression in St. Luke,[4] that he not only lived in the most unfrequented parts of the country in total retirement, but was separated at an early age even from his parents. Thus much at least is certain, that none of the evangelists give a single intimation of his holding any intercourse with his

[3] Is. xlii. 3. [4] Luke i. 80.

family, even after he had entered on the course of his ministry, when the end of his previous seclusion had been obtained. There was also a roughness in his whole preaching, which, if not intended to answer a particular purpose, would almost seem calculated to frustrate the object of his appearance. There was originally more external readiness to hear him, than our Lord met with; but on seeing the multitude flock to his baptism, he addressed them in language which would have the effect of discouraging rather than attracting followers. "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." His very next observation is directed against their most favourite and deeply-rooted prejudice; and would certainly not have been received by them with friendly feelings. "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father."[5] Nor did he attempt to conciliate his disciples by shewing any indulgence to the weakness of their newly-imbibed principles. They were made to fast often, and taught to pray frequently, and to submit themselves without murmuring to all the hardships of the abstemious and ascetic life of their master.

The whole personal character and behaviour

[5] Matt. iii. 7—9.

of Jesus was so strikingly different, that his enemies took occasion to found a reproach on the contrast thus exhibited between the Son of man and his messenger. "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." "They said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make long prayers . . . . but thine eat and drink?" "Wisdom," said our Lord in reply to these objections, "is justified of her children."[6] He would not impose upon the babes of his newly-formed household a yoke which they were unable to bear. His care of them was as that of God over his Israel, when, on their departure out of Egypt, he "led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt."[7] He condescended to open a way into the hearts of his disciples by winning their affections, and thus, according to the apostolical precept, "pleased his neighbour for his good to edification." "For," as St. Paul continues, after proposing our Lord's example to our imitation, "even Christ pleased not himself;

[6] Luke v. 33; vii. 33—35. [7] Exod. xiii. 17, 18.

but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me."[8] He sanctioned by his example all the kindly feelings of our nature; and while he taught his apostles not to overstrain the cord which is at its full tension, or bend, till it breaks, the yet unseasoned bow, he left for the imitation of the private christian a pattern of the manner, in which, as a son, a relation, or a friend, the demands of society should be fulfilled; how the mutual charities which tend to strengthen and endear the ties of domestic life should be attended to; how the affections of the heart should be cherished and cultivated by all who desire to be conformed to the image of their redeemer.

The pleasing medium, through which Christ is thus exhibited to our contemplations in all the tenderness of his personal character, brings him at once within the scope of our affections; and renders him an object of love as our friend, as well as of adoration as our Saviour. His sympathy with human feelings is the very groundwork of the confidence, through which we "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy." "For," as the apostle argues, "we have not an high priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities."[9]

[8] Rom. xv. 2, 3. [9] Heb. iv. 15, 16.

Not that it was necessary for Christ to take upon him our flesh in order to understand its nature, and become conscious that it needed the intercession of a compassionate advocate. As God, he was acquainted with it from the beginning; and his personal experience added nothing to his intimate knowledge of the frailties of his creatures, whose form he voluntarily assumed. But, as it would be difficult for man to understand, how so great and unapproachable a spirit as God could stoop so low as to enter into the feelings, and make allowance for the infirmities of his creatures, it became of the utmost consequence, that the conviction of his sympathy with our condition should be impressed on our minds by such a proof of his past condescension, as would be sufficient to establish in us a firm belief of his tender regard for mankind. Hence the propriety of his having been made like unto man; that, when we contemplate him in his character of mediator, we may divest him as it were of his divine attributes, and apply with more freedom to our advocate, as the son of man, who, before he passed into the heavens, was in all things tempted like as we are. In witnessing the amazing condescension of his care for his ancient people, we can now recognize the type of his paternal love for his spiritual Israel—"In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel

of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them and carried them all the days of old."[1] We can now understand, as well as believe, that Christ, although exalted to the right hand of his Father, continues to feel the same tenderness for his church which distinguished him while on earth. As a pledge that he always identifies himself with the cause of his followers, we can dwell on his question to Saul when journeying to Damascus—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me?*" It was against the disciples that this zealous enemy of the new religion had been breathing out threatenings and slaughter; but the Lord was pleased to look upon the persecutions inflicted on them, as offered directly to himself; and charges the author of their sufferings with the crime of having fought against God in person—"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."[2] The idea of Christ's union with his people, and of his participation in their interests, is thus brought home to the mind; and becomes an additional motive for love to such a compassionate Saviour. They can dwell with perfect repose on that most exquisite and unequalled ex-

[1] Is. lxiii. 9. [2] Acts ix. 4, 5. Matt. xxv. 40.

pression of tenderness—"He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye."[3]

It is to this feature in our Lord's character that the evangelists refer, when any striking instances of his mercy are mentioned. Did he look complacently upon the hopeful points in the character of the young man, who came to him running, and asking how he might inherit eternal life? St. Mark tells us, it was because "Jesus, beholding him, loved him."[4] Did he give proof of his power over death by restoring Lazarus again to his family? It was because "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."[5] Was he desirous in his last conversation with the apostles to omit no topic, which could edify, or comfort, or support them under their approaching state of bereavement? It was because knowing "that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."[6] Did he so forget his own sufferings in the moment of his

[3] Zech. ii. 8. [4] Mark x. 21.

[5] John xi. 5.

[6] John xiii. 1. Robinson remarks, that, "especially towards the close of his life, every minute circumstance was so ordered, as to shew the strength and tenderness of his affection for the dear followers whom he had chosen to himself." —*Scripture Characters*, vol. iii. 150.

last agony, as to provide for the support of his mother, and the alleviation of her sorrows during the remainder of the days of her widowhood? It was to the "disciple whom Jesus loved," that he recommended her for protection, as a last token of his confidence in the strength and permanence of his follower's attachment.[7] Did he wish to convey some idea to his disciples of the extent and nature of his own regard for them? He could find no fitter measure for it than by comparing it with the love of God for his only-begotten Son, or in describing it as a love even unto death,—"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."[8] It is through his love that we have spiritual strength—"In all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."[9] It is through the same love that we are provided with his intercession in our behalf through all eternity, for what is said concerning the permanency of his love for his disciples in the days of his flesh, is equally applicable to every generation of believers—"Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."[1]

But above all, it was his love, which pro-

7 John xix. 26.
8 John xv. 9, 13.
9 Rom. viii. 37.
1 John xiii. 1.

duced that voluntary abasement and sacrifice of himself, which made satisfaction for the sins of the world. "We live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us." "Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever; Amen!"[2] And how is this love enhanced, when we think what they are, on whom it is bestowed! Tenderness shewn to man in his fallen state, is surely the highest exercise of the feeling. Yet herein "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[3]

Again; Christ gave us the distinguishing badge of his religion, the precept of love, which was to know no limit, and to be restricted by no exception. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."[4] And as the large concessions, which

[2] Gal. ii. 20. Eph. v. 2. Rev. i. 5, 6. [3] Rom. v. 8.
[4] John xiii. 34. Matt. v. 44.

moralists were in the habit of making to the human heart, rendered it necessary that the law should be accompanied by particular remarks as to its extent, it was declared that, with the spirit and meaning of this commandment, every angry or revengeful feeling, every unforgiving or persecuting temper, every malicious thought or uncharitable emotion, is at utter variance. So beautifully does the religion of Christ provide for the amelioration of the moral character, by disallowing and eradicating all those disfiguring passions, which make the heart of man to be fruitful in evil, instead of the seat of love, and the image of its Creator.

Since therefore the human ministry of Jesus was based on his love and tenderness for mankind, there would have been a manifest inconsistency between the author of the religion and the religion itself, if the tenor of his personal character had not coincided with the object of his mission. It was in the natural order of things, that a messenger sent on an errand of mercy should go about doing good ; and that he who announced his yoke as easy, and his burden as light, should appear as the mild and compassionate teacher of divine truth. Had he come as a judge, he would have been surrounded with the terrors and penalties of the law ; or as a king, he would have been encompassed with the

majesty of sovereign power; but the softer accents of peace and pardon, the glad tidings of reconciliation, and the gracious promises of the gospel, were far more characteristic of him, who came in the office of the beneficent prophet of the church, and was waited for as the consolation of Israel.

"God is love,"[5] writes the apostle, who was himself the beloved of his Saviour and God; and our Lord, in taking upon himself the likeness of man, did not divest himself of this gracious attribute of divinity. Frequently as he had to repress the insults of the unfriendly, or to correct the misconceptions of the ignorant, his answers were always remarkable for that heavenly mildness, which never forsook him even in the most trying scenes. Witness the gentleness with which he convicted Simon the Pharisee of his intolerance towards the woman who had been a sinner[6]—an admirable example for the imitation of those who are to reclaim and instruct with all fidelity, but in all love. This spirit was never more touchingly displayed than in cases where his disciples were concerned. When the chosen three, who were witnesses of his agony, continued sleeping, notwithstanding his caution, he is himself the first to allege the excuse which they did not offer for themselves—"The spirit

[5] 1 John iv. 8. [6] Luke vii. 39—47.

indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."[7] When Peter denied him, he upbraided him for his apostasy only by a glance full of pity—"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter."[8] When Judas betrayed him, his only reproach was conveyed by the use of a term, which must have reminded the conscience of the traitor of the familiar relation in which he stood to his Lord—"Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"[9] When Thomas doubted, instead of giving him up to unbelief, he granted the additional testimony which the apostle required, and gently cautioned him "to be not faithless, but believing."[1]

The same tenderness may be observed in our Lord's reply to James and John, when they made their ill-timed request for honours in the supposed temporal kingdom of their master. The presumption and ignorance, evinced by the demand itself, and the self-confidence, with which they undertook to promise for their own sufficiency, might have justly deserved a severe rebuke. But the wisdom that is from above is "gentle."[2] Instead of chiding them for what was amiss, Christ kindly notices the spirit of attachment which dictated their answer to his

[7] Matt. xxvi. 41. [8] Luke xxii. 61.
[9] Matt. xxvi. 50, compared with Luke xxii. 48.
[1] John xx. 27. [2] James iii. 17.

question; and without dwelling on their mistaken notions, seems willing to point out the way of attaining to higher honours than those which their ambition had desired.[3]

A similar spirit is displayed in the reply to Pilate on the judgment-seat—"he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin"—intimating, that a distinction would be taken in his favour between his guilt in yielding to the importunity of the multitude; and the guilt of the Jewish high priest with his council, whose opportunities of knowing out of the law, that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," were so much greater than those of the Gentile judge.[4]

If taken singly, these instances of kind forbearance on the part of our Lord would be sufficient to exemplify the force of the apostle's argument, when he besought the Corinthian converts "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ;" and viewed together, they establish a character of consistent and heavenly meekness, bearing the strongest testimony to the declaration of scripture, that the Word, which was made flesh, and dwelt among us, "was God."[5]

It will also appear, that the tenderness of Christ was not so much manifested on the occasions which call forth sympathy in general, as

[3] Mark x. 35—40. [4] John xix. 11; Matt. xvi. 16.
[5] John i. 1. 14. 2 Cor. x. 1.

on those by which the sensibility of the greater part of mankind is rarely excited.

Who are the men whom the world generally loves and admires, and for whom it reserves the greatest share of its friendship or approbation? They, whose qualifications coincide with some standard established by the authority of current opinion—who are distinguished by situation, or personal advantages, or wealth, or some other adventitious recommendation—who are lively in their feelings, jealous of their reputation, prompt in avenging supposed affronts on their honour, eager in the pursuit of pleasure, insensible of personal danger.

But these are not the qualifications of the friends of our Saviour, whose praise is in all the churches. It is the poor in spirit, and they that mourn, the meek, and they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, whom Christ commends, and on whom he pronounces his blessing. It was to the penitent, humbled in the dust, that he said, "Peace be unto thee; be of good cheer." He warned his disciples, that they should not despise one of the little ones; for every one of them, however low and neglected among men in general, enjoyed special tokens of the divine favour. He did not call around him the rich and mighty and noble, (though he was far from discouraging or repulsing their advances,)

but he invited by a particular address those who laboured and were heavy laden, to come to him for rest to their souls. Nor was it to the world at large that he promised the manifestation of himself, and the love of his Father; but to those of whatever class or whatever degree who kept his commandments.[6]

It happened accordingly that many characters, not commonly looked upon as objects of pity, attracted (perhaps for the sake of affording a lesson to men) a more than ordinary portion of our Lord's attention. It was the leper, who was avoided as the outcast of his nation, and whose very presence was shunned, as a source of defilement and reproach, whose hopeless condition was selected as a fit subject for the exercise of almighty power. It was with publicans and sinners, with whom others thought it disgraceful to hold any intercourse, that he freely associated; because they were the persons who most required to be benefited by communion with him.[7] To the good, even among men, it is no ordinary trial to be called upon in the course of duty to mix with individuals of profligate character; and often to hear, during their necessary connexion with the world, a profession of opinions entirely at variance with their own re-

[6] Matt. v. 3—5. 10; xviii. 10; xi. 28. John xiv. 21.

[7] Matt. viii. 2—4; Luke xvii. 12—14; Matt. ix. 10—14; xi. 19.

ligious belief. But on such occasions how much more acutely must our Saviour have felt, whose nature would revolt instinctively from impurity of every kind; and whose own character was exposed to suspicion, because he did not think it beneath him to call to repentance even the worst of men![8]

The evangelists concur in representing, that it was principally for others that Christ's concern was manifested, though he was himself emphatically a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Like David, "rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because men kept not his law."[9] He was "moved with compassion" for the multitudes, because they fainted for lack of knowledge, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.[1] He was "grieved" for proud and prejudiced unbelievers—for the hardness of heart of the Pharisees—for the miseries about to come on Jerusalem in consequence of her persecuting and rebellious spirit—for the sin of his murderers, in whose behalf he uttered, in the midst of his own sufferings, that extenuating prayer—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."[2] On his way to Calvary, under the burden of the cross itself, his thoughts were not taken

[8] Luke vii. 37—47.

[9] Ps. cxix. 136.

[1] Matt. ix. 36. Compare also xiv. 14.

[2] Mark iii. 5. Luke xix. 41—44; xxiii. 34.

up with his own sorrows, but were occupied with diverting the lamentation of the women who bewailed him into another channel—"Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."[3] One of the strongest expressions of feeling ascribed by the evangelists to our Lord, was occasioned by the obstinate unbelief of the Pharisees. "He sighed deeply in his heart, and saith, why doth this generation seek after a sign?"[4] He wept indeed at the grave of Lazarus; but his tears were probably far more excited by the hard-heartedness of the Jews, and by the thoughts of that wretchedness, which sin had brought into the world, and of which the scene immediately before his eyes was so affecting an instance, than by the sorrow of the bystanders, which was so soon to be turned into joy. Indeed, St. John expressly attributes his grief to their want of faith in distrusting the extent of his power after the many miracles they had witnessed. "Some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused, that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, cometh to the grave."[5]

The circumstances of this case were in fact such as would touch every tender feeling in the

[3] Luke xxiii. 28. [4] Mark viii. 12.

[5] John xi. 33—38.

heart of our merciful and faithful high priest. They whom he loved more than his own life were around him; for whose sake he had left the bosom of the Father, and had renounced the adoration of all the hosts of heaven, to become the object of scorn and persecution on earth. But of all that multitude, whom curiosity or sympathy had collected round the grave of Lazarus, not one was filled with a proper sense of the character of him, who had taken up his residence in the flesh among them; or was influenced by any confiding belief in his unlimited rule over the spirits of quick and dead. The disciples were so far from expecting any extraordinary reversal of the laws of nature, that, on the proposition of Thomas, (ver. 16,) they had gone that they might die with their master; conceiving that he would be exposed to unusual danger from the vicinity of Bethany to Jerusalem. Neither Martha or Mary thought, that the power of Jesus could avail to heal their brother, without his personal presence; much less to restore him to life after his actual decease; though neither of them hesitated to acknowledge, that, if he had been there, Lazarus had not died. The remaining spectators openly murmured against the apparent limitation of that power, which had sufficed to bestow sight upon the blind, but seemed unequal to the performance of

a miracle, the consequences of which would be still more beneficial. With these instances of human frailty in his sight, well might Jesus groan in the spirit, and be troubled at the vail, which sin had cast over the understandings of men, and lament the hardness of heart from which even his most familiar associates were not free.

The case of the widow of Nain affords another beautiful illustration of our Lord's tenderness. She was in bitterness, not only for her first-born, but for the only son of her widowed bed. The presence of much people of the city marked their sympathy with the mother's loss, and their sense of the extent of her bereavement. No one bespoke our Lord's interposition in her behalf; but "in his love and in his pity"[6] he prevented the mourner with the blessings of his goodness, and without waiting for an application, saluted her with the comforting words,—"Weep not."[7] It was a work of mercy worthy of him who came to redeem the soul of the young man from eternal death, to respite for a time his mortal body from the grave. And therefore, to borrow the almost prophetic words of Job, "he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom."[8]

[6] Isa. lxiii. 9. [7] Luke vii. 11—15.
[8] Job xxxiii. 24.

Upon several occasions our Lord referred to the miracles which he wrought, as one of the tests of his divine mission. Now it would have been sufficient for this purpose, had they been nothing more than abstract exertions of superhuman power. The evidence derived from them would have been equally strong, had they only consisted of such acts, as causing stones to be made bread for the relief of his own personal wants; or casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, to demonstrate, that he was secure from harm under the ministration of attendant angels.[9] He might have proved his dominion over the elements by walking on the water, when no urgent danger of his friends required his presence; or by calming the sea, when his disciples were not exposed to its fury.[1] He might have called down fire from heaven, according to the suggestion of his disciples, to consume his enemies; or he might have struck down to the ground in a moment the servant of the high priest, instead of healing his ear with a touch, and restraining the unreasonable violence of Peter.[2]

Besides; waiving these considerations, historical precedents might have warranted the expectation, that miraculous power would be

[9] Matt. iv. 3—6. [1] Matt. xiv. 25; Mark iv. 39.
[2] Luke ix. 24; xxii. 51.

evinced rather by acts calculated to awe and terrify, than by acts of mercy. When Moses was ordered to give proof by means of signs that the Lord had appeared to him, and had sent him to Pharaoh; it was by destructive plagues, and the loss of the first-born of the land, that he produced an unwilling conviction of the truth of his commission.[3] When the children mocked Elisha, the prophet vindicated his authority as a man of God by cursing them in the name of the Lord, "and there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."[4]

But it was more consistent with the tenor of our Saviour's character, to produce the same general result in another way. It is true, that, except he did signs and wonders, the people would not believe; but the miracles which he worked for their conviction were miracles of beneficence; and his power was commonly exerted on those very persons, who from the nature of their disorder, or its inveteracy, were the greatest objects of compassion. It was the man who had been blind from his birth—or the patient who had been afflicted with an infirmity thirty-eight years—or the only son of a widow—or the woman who had spent all her living upon physicians without relief—who experienced by their

[3] Exod. vii.—xii. [4] 2 Kings ii. 24.

cures, that authority was given to their benefactor to stop the progress of disease, and suspend the ordinary course of nature.[5] It is true of every action of his life, that he "declared his almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity."[6]

A similar spirit prevailed in his choice of the powers with which he gifted the apostles and seventy disciples, on sending them forth before him into the cities of the Jews. They were to heal the sick—to cleanse the lepers—to raise the dead—to cast out devils.[7] The authenticity of their commission was to be established by the benefits conferred through their medium; but if those benefits failed of effecting the desired impression, they were not authorized to resort to any acts of a different tendency in order to produce conviction by terror, or by the infliction of judgments. If any house or city refused to receive them, they were simply ordered to depart from it, and to shake off the dust from their feet, as a token against its inhabitants. After Christ's death, Ananias and Sapphira, Herod, and Elymas the sorcerer, were all rendered examples that the Lord's hand was as able to strike as it had been to save; but during the period of his

[5] John ix. 1; v. 5. Luke vii. 11; viii. 43.

[6] Collect for Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

[7] Matt. x. 1. 8. Luke x. 9.

ministry not a single instance occurs of his laying aside the compassionate character of a Saviour to assume the severer part of an avenger or judge.

There is also a perfect analogy in this respect between the language of our Lord and his actions. The tone of kindness which was manifested in his discourses, coincided uniformly with the gracious errand of his ministry. I allude particularly to his frequent use of the word "son;"[8] and to the strength and variety of the terms he employed to designate the nature of his affection for those whom he was about to redeem with his precious blood. The same feeling prevailed in the condescending notice taken of the poor widow, who cast her two mites into the treasury.[9] It shone forth conspicuously in his tenderness to the young—a characteristic of his ministry peculiarly worthy of the imitation of pastors.[1] It may also be observed in the subject of many of his parables—especially in those of the lost sheep, and lost piece of money, of the good Samaritan, and of the ungrateful servant—parables, which could only have been conceived by a mind, wherein love towards man was the ruling principle. To this may be added the just remark of Dr. Townson, that where "the case did

[8] Matt. ix. 2, 22. Mark x. 24. John xiii. 33. xxi. 5.

[9] Mark xii. 42. [1] Matt. xix. 13—15. John xxi. 15.

not demand severity, there is a great lenity of supposition in the state of his parables. The wise virgins are as many as the foolish. In the parable of the ten talents we find two good and faithful, and only one unprofitable servant. At the marriage feast, only one of a large assembly is represented as wanting a wedding-garment."[2]

Tenderness to others, if it be not founded upon, is at least inseparable from, an absence of all selfish feeling. Indifferent, therefore, as our Lord was to personal privations, he was too thoughtful of the wants of others to expose them to trials, from which, at the same time, he never shrunk himself. A remarkable instance of our Lord's postponement of personal considerations to the good of souls occurs Matt. xiv. 13, 14. After the death of the Baptist, Jesus withdrew, for his own security, into a desert place. Thither the people followed, and flocked to hear him; when our Saviour, instead of persevering in his retirement, was moved with compassion, and regardless of the danger to which he was exposed, went forth and healed them. When the multitudes who resorted to him in the desert had nothing to eat, he had compassion on them and worked a miracle in their behalf; yet he listened so little to the demands of his own nature in a similar situation, that his conversation with the

[2] *Sermon on* Luke iv. 32.

woman of Samaria was marked with as much energy and patience, as if he had not been previously wearied with his journey, and in want of the refreshment which the apostles were gone to seek. There would have been, had he chosen to avail himself of it, a plausible pretence for declining to enter into a discussion, even if the woman, instead of our Lord, had made the first advances to the conference. For the very act of talking with a Samaritan was considered as such an extraordinary instance of condescension in a Jew, that the woman herself remarked it with surprise; and when his disciples returned, they were only restrained from inquiring the cause of such an unusual occurrence, by their habitual deference to Christ's authority.[3]

A similar observation will apply to his conduct towards the apostles in the garden of Gethsemane. He would not have them tempted above what they were able, and therefore exempted them at this time from personal suffering. He hardened them to endure warfare by making them witnesses of his own conflict, before they were constrained to bear the cross themselves. Even in this preparatory lesson, some were distinguished more than others. Each had his post assigned him in proportion to the measure of his strength. The weakest sat awhile at a distance. The three

[3] John iv. 9. 27.

chosen apostles were privileged to approach to a nearer fellowship with his sufferings, but were not admitted to be the companions of his prayer. In tenderness for their infirmity, rather than in token of his favour, he withdrew from them about a stone's cast, and spared them the sight of all the intensity of his agony. It is plain indeed from what followed, that they could not have borne a closer view of his passion; for when our Lord left them, their eyes were heavy, and in spite of repeated warnings, he three times returned and found them sleeping. Such an apparent want of sympathy with their master, when the hour of his distress was weighing upon his mind with so much bitterness, might well have justified, and perhaps might have even seemed to call for, the language of reproof. But, touched as he was with his own trials, his pity for human frailty restrained him from uttering any thing stronger than an expostulation, directed particularly to Peter, who had so lately protested his fidelity, and couched rather in the gentlest terms of surprise, than of rebuke. "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?"[4]

[4] Mark xiv. 37. "So gentle a rebuke, and so kind an apology, as Archbishop Tillotson very justly and beautifully observes, were the more remarkable, as our Lord's mind was now discomposed with sorrow, so that he must have the deeper

When this expression fell from our Lord, another evangelist tells us that he was in an agony.[5] Such was the extremity of his mental suffering, that the powers of his body were scarcely sufficient to bear up against it. Men are apt to excuse themselves for momentary expressions of unkindness or peevishness, under pretence of their proceeding from temporary irritation, or the pressure of accidental distress. But from the contemplation of the habitual temper of Christ, who at such an hour did not forget to be gracious, man may learn, even in the unhappiest moments of life, to practise that forbearance in his intercourse with others, of which he himself stands in daily need from them, as well as from God. That weight of sorrow which affected our Lord so powerfully in the garden of Gethsemane, was foreseen by him in all its intensity, before he set his face to go up to Jerusalem. His human nature must have shrunk from the anticipation; yet, with the view of gradually familiarizing the minds of his disciples to the idea of his sufferings, he dwelt on the subject in his conversations unceasingly, and shewed an indulgence to their weakness, which he denied to his own personal feelings. In

and tenderer sense of the unkindness of his friends."—*Doddridge* in loc.

[5] Luke xxii. 44.

a word, he dealt with his little flock, like Jacob with his family, on his journey to Succoth. He knew "that the children were tender, and the flocks and herds with young were with him; and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock would die."[6] He therefore "led on softly, acording as they were able to endure;" and made provision for the continuance of the same spirit among his ministers, by his affectionate charge to Peter, to "feed his lambs."[7]

Instances of this tenderness to the infirmities of his disciples were almost of daily occurrence. A touching example is recorded by St. Mark, when, remembering that they were but men, he led them apart into a desert place, to rest awhile; "for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."[8] Analogous to this was his gentle rebuke of the unbelief of Thomas;[9] and the mildness with which he listened to the interested inquiry of Peter, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Instead of exposing the carnal expectations of the apostle, he encourages him by the prospect of future reward—not indeed of that earthly greatness, which the worldly hopes of his follower had anticipated, but of a participation in the king-

[6] Gen. xxxiii. 13.
[7] Gr. ἄρνια· agnellos. John xxi. 15.
[8] Mark vi. 31.
[9] John xx. 29.

dom of the Son of man, when he should "sit on the throne of his glory."[1]

It deserves remark, that Christ never delayed an act of mercy; except it was for a higher manifestation of his omnipotence—as in the case of Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus—or for the trial of faith—as in the woman of Canaan.[2] There is not a single instance recorded of his sending away applicants for relief, because they troubled him. In the case of the dropsical man, who was brought for cure while he was entertained in the house of one of the Pharisees, many reasons seemed to concur to induce him to defer the miracle. A plan had been systematically arranged for entrapping him, in which his host had probably joined with others of his sect, and while he sat at meat "they watched him"—a point to which St. Luke calls attention in a particular manner. It was the sabbath; and umbrage had been taken not long before at a cure which our Lord had performed in the synagogue on that day. A delay of a few hours, till those persons

[1] Matt. xix. 27, 28. See also the commendation he gave his disciples in his discourse at the last passover. He passes by the many instances of their weakness, and praises their fidelity—"Ye are they who have continued with me."—Luke xxii. 28.

[2] Compare Mark v. 24. 35, 36, and John xi. 3, 4. 11. 15. 21—23. Matt. xv. 22—28.

had withdrawn, whose presence was dangerous, or till the season of holy rest, for which they professed so much jealousy, had passed, would have been of little apparent consequence to the object of our Lord's compassion, whose disorder was probably of long standing; and who would have accepted thankfully any hope of relief, which he might have been encouraged to expect on a future and not distant day. But Christ was not to be deterred from his purpose of mercy by a mode of reasoning, which might have prevailed with one, who was less intent on going about to do good. Regardless of the consequences to himself, where the life or comfort of another was concerned, he took him, and healed him, and let him go.[3]

This was an act seemingly much more likely to awaken the jealousy of the rulers, than most of those cures, which our Lord so frequently desired might be concealed from their knowledge; lest (as commentators in general explain the prohibition) a premature attempt should be made on his life, or the people should raise him to a temporal kingdom. It would seem therefore that there are grounds for conjecturing that Christ's injunction was founded on other causes than those usually assigned; and that, sometimes at least, it originated in tenderness to the

[3] Luke xiv. 1—4.

safety of others, rather than of himself. The odium which attached to the master was naturally transferred to his followers; and those whom he had benefited so signally by curing their diseases would become, of course, the objects of the hatred and persecution of the Pharisees. Would our Lord endanger their faith, and expose them to the difficulties which all his friends were called to encounter, at least until a longer acquaintance with their benefactor had prepared them to take all things patiently, and to suffer for his sake? We are told at one time, that among the chief rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees even they did not venture to confess him openly, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.[4] Inconveniences, therefore, and perhaps serious dangers, were to be apprehended by those who spread the report of a new miracle; and by dispensing with an open acknowledgment of their gratitude, when no important object was to be obtained by giving publicity to their cure, Christ conferred on those whom he healed, the additional benefit of shielding them from the resentment of the Jews. He who could shew so much anxiety to vindicate from the indignation of his disciples the woman, who

[4] John xii. 42. Their belief however bore strong marks of insincerity. Compare the next verse with John v. 44.

poured the precious ointment on his head,[5] would be still more desirous of protecting those, whom he had miraculously restored to health, from the worse consequences, which might be expected to arise from the anger of the chief priests and Pharisees.

In concluding the view of this feature in our Lord's character, a few remarks of a practical tendency may be added.

1. The tenderness of Christ for his people is an earnest of his eternal faithfulness to their cause and interests. It is a pledge of the continuance of his care for his brethren by redemption. It is a testimony, that he will love his own which are in the world unto the end, and will make provision for their spiritual wants with untired paternal solicitude.

Seasons will occur in the progress of the christian through the wilderness of the world, when he will stand in need of the comfort to be derived from this reflection. For, though the constancy of Christ's love is such, that it cannot be removed from him, unless he voluntarily renounce belief in him as a Saviour, and obedience to him as a lawgiver; yet it may be eclipsed, as it were, for a little moment, and the soul may be dejected by the apparent withdrawing of the divine favour from it.

[5] Matt. xxvi. 7—13.

Under such a trial the believer can be supported only by the consciousness of the unchangeable permanency of the affections of his redeemer. It is then that is learnt the unspeakable value of those truths which the gospel alone reveals, and which constitute its peculiar and exclusive treasure—that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"—that "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted"—and that "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[6] It was the promise of God to Solomon respecting the temple, "mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually."[7] It is the christian's privilege to rejoice in the same assurance: and, like St. Paul, he triumphs in the certainty, that, "notwithstanding, the Lord stands with him."[8] He knows that, as of old, so now, in all his affliction his Saviour is afflicted, and the angel of his presence saves him.[9] We too often forfeit the blessings of this union by the waywardness of our own affections, and the insensibility to spiritual things which takes possession of the mind; for where there is no sympathy in tastes, there can be no tenderness in friendship. "Can two

[6] Heb. ii. 18; xiii. 8. Rom. ix. 35—39.
[7] 2 Chron. vii. 16. [8] 2 Tim. iv. 17.
[9] Is. lxiii. 9.

walk together except they be agreed?"[1] and yet it is to be feared, that Christ might frequently expostulate with us in the language addressed to one of the ungrateful of old—"Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"[2] He stretches out his arms to us, as formerly to the chosen people of his adoption; but too often finds us, like them, a disobedient and gainsaying generation.

Nor must it be forgotten, that external union does not necessarily imply a real harmony of feelings; and that it by no means follows that all those who are outwardly members of Christ's visible church on earth, will also be subjects of his spiritual kingdom in heaven. There is reason to fear, that, in point of fact, a practical error on this subject prevails extensively; as they too well know who have an opportunity of witnessing—what the duties of parochial clergy lead them to witness daily—the miserable shifts, to which the human heart will have recourse, in order to stifle its conviction of the wrath of God against sin. But let it be remembered, that, as Judas walked with our Lord during his personal ministry, without imbibing any portion of the spirit of his master, so even now there may be external companionship, without any actual participation of interests; and much apparent intercourse, without congenial feeling, and real

[1] Amos iii. 3. [2] 2 Sam. xvi. 17.

assimilation of principle. The vital distinction, which the apostle pointed out among the Jews, prevails also among those, who have been nominally admitted into the christian covenant. "They are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."[3]

2. Our Lord's example seems to put a strong mark of condemnation on any undue harshness in the discharge of the duties of the christian teacher.

Paul instructs Timothy, that "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men . . . . . in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."[4] To win by love, and not to constrain by terror, should be the aim of those, who are privileged to serve in what is characteristically termed "the ministry of reconciliation."[5] "While they carry with them a message of peace and love, they should prove, by the kindness of their deportment, that they wish to promote the happiness of all."[6] Dr.

[3] Rom. ix. 6, 7; ii. 28, 29. [4] 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.
[5] 2 Cor. v. 18. [6] *Robinson's Scripture Characters*, ii. 473.

Dwight lays much stress on this trait in the ministerial character. "An affectionate manner," he says, "is in itself amiable and engaging. Men naturally love those who appear benevolent and tender-hearted; and most of all, require and love this character in a minister of the gospel."[7] The prevailing tone of their exhortations should be regulated by meditation on that gracious tenderness with which Christ laboured to bring sinners to a sense of the heinousness of guilt. They should not be irritated by the weakness of those for whom they labour; but provide, as far as in them lies, against their besetting temptations, by intercessory prayer in their behalf. Intercession is the minister's privilege. He must plead for sinners with his master's plea, and with his master's earnestness, "Lord, let them alone this year also."[8] It is a proof either of listlessness of feeling very unbecoming him, who should watch over the souls of others as one who must give account, or of culpable indifference to the

[7] *Sermon* cliii. A characteristic remark of Mr. Cecil may be added in illustration. "I feel a congeniality with the character of Jeremiah. I seem to understand him. I could approach him, and feel encouraged to familiarity. It is not so with Elijah or Ezekiel. There is a rigour and severity about them, which seem to repel me to a distance, and excite reverence rather than sympathy and love."—*Remains*, p. 21.

[8] Luke xiii. 8.

eternal interests of a fellow-creature, whenever there is not much sorrow for a fallen brother, as well as much charity in the treatment of his case, with a view to reclaim him. Noah's righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the unlawful deeds around him; and Jeremiah wept day and night for the slain of the daughter of his people."[9] Very different was the spirit exhibited by the chief priests to Judas, confessing his betrayal of the innocent blood. "What is that to us? see thou to that."[1] It would have comported better with their pastoral office had they manifested concern for this lost sheep, fostering the compunctions of his remorse, and bringing him back on their shoulders, rejoicing, to the fold. The good shepherd feels that he is his brother's keeper, even till the moment when the axe is laid to the root of the tree; and his care becomes the more urgent, and his pity more importunate, in proportion as his hopes decrease, and the season allotted to the sinner passes, without producing fruits meet for repentance. He takes up the language of the prophets and apostles, and is never weary of emulating their affectionate expostulations. "O that they were wise." "Come, ye children, hearken unto me." "O that my head were waters, and mine

9 2 Pet. ii. 8. Jer. ix. 1. See also xiii. 7. Rom. ix. 1—3.

1 Matt. xxvii. 4.

eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." "Our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged."[2] These are the "cords of a man," and the "bands of love" with which God draws;"[3] and his ministers will find their account in using the same means as their gracious Father. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God."[4]

There is, however, much in human nature, that hinders us from feeling the influence of this brotherly sympathy as we ought; and, instead of hoping even against hope, or forgiving till seventy times seven, we are too often dispirited at the first unfavourable symptom, and silenced or estranged by a single trespass. A deep consciousness of our own frailty will best promote tenderness in our behaviour to others, whom we wish to bring back, like the prodigal son to the house of his father. The Israelites were enjoined not to oppress a stranger, inasmuch as they had experienced themselves the miseries of the situation, and "knew the heart of a stranger, seeing they were strangers in the land of Egypt."[5] The spirit of the precept, as well as of many others under the old law which appear to have

[2] Deut. xxxii. 29. Ps. xxxiv. 11. Jer. ix. 1. 2 Cor. vi. 11.
[3] Hos. xi. 4. [4] Is. xl. 1.
[5] Ex. xxiii. 9.

only a temporary force, is of universal application. An obligation of the same kind is virtually laid on the christian to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."[6]

It is thus that the imitation of Christ's example will bring us to the same conclusion at which the apostle arrives by a different mode of argument. He pronounces in a more authoritative way than is usual with him—"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."[7] He illustrates his precept by his own behaviour, and reminds his Corinthian converts of his known sympathy with them, whatever might be their state of mind—"Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"[8] And again, in another place, he puts it to their conscience, whether "through their knowledge should the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"[9] And in the same spirit of considerate tenderness the Hebrews are exhorted "to make straight paths for their feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but to let it rather be healed."[1]

3. Real tenderness, according to our Lord's

[6] Heb. v. 2. [7] Rom. xv. 1. [8] 2 Cor. xi. 29.
[9] 1 Cor. viii. 11. [1] Heb. xii. 13.

exemplification of the quality, will manifest itself in a way, which differs from the ordinary mode of estimating it.

It will not be seen so much in the mere act of indulgence, as in the steady pursuit of what is most conducive to the true interest of others. It will not always take present happiness or immediate good as the measure of that interest; but looking onward with a prospective view to the wants of eternity, will consider that to be the highest exercise of love, which provides an immortal soul with the means of laying up treasure in heaven. Our Lord calls upon Peter to testify his love by the tenderness of his concern for his weaker brethren—"Lovest thou me? .... feed my lambs; .... feed my sheep"—as if such a charge were the employment, which would be not more congenial to his feelings, than consistent with his renewed professions of attachment to his heavenly master.[2] The connexion too which St. Paul establishes between his love for the converts and his earnestness for their spiritual welfare is very prominently insisted on in that beautiful appeal to the Thessalonians, every word of which is conceived in the true spirit and fervency of pastoral love. "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of

[2] John xxi. 15, 16.

you, we were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. . . . . Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."[3] The addresses of the apostles are full of this mildness and affection. Instead of employing the sternness of authority, they "put" their christian brethren "in remembrance," as those who had already known and were established in the truth; or they "put them in mind," as being "full of goodness . . . able also to admonish one another."[4] They might have claimed "dominion over the faith" of the converts, as their spiritual fathers; but they chose rather to be "helpers of their joy."[5]

4. Lastly, a few words may be added respecting a false view, which is sometimes taken of the nature of Christ's character.

There is a tendency in men who are conscious of having offended against the light of the gospel, to overlook, in the richness of its promises, that the wrath of God is declared against all unrighteousness on the same authority, which offers pardon and salvation to the penitent. They are willing to suppose, that because he desires not the death of a sinner, he will forbear to punish him, though he remain in unrepented sin.

[3] 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. 11. [4] Rom. xv. 14. 2 Pet. i. 13.
[5] 2 Cor. i. 24.

But the tenderness of Christ, unbounded as it is, will never be suffered to interfere with his justice. Had it been otherwise, he would not have stooped to take upon himself the infirmities of the human nature, or have submitted to death upon the cross. There is not a single expression in the holy scriptures to warrant the belief that the mercy of our Saviour will be extended to one, who tempts him so presumptuously as to persist in wilful sin. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"[6]

The covenant of the new dispensation is a covenant of love founded upon the free gift of salvation;—but, at the same time, it is a covenant of indispensable holiness. The tenderness of its author is shewn in the forgiveness of repented and forsaken sin; but not in permitting a continuance in transgression. There is nothing like connivance at crime in the principles of the gospel. Through its medium, on the contrary, "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."[7] For, the very restoration of man to the favour of the Father, implies a restoration to his likeness, —a restoration to a capacity of increasing in heavenly wisdom,—a restoration to a state, from

[6] Rom. ii. 4. [7] Ps. lxxxv 10.

which spirituality and holiness are inseparable; and redemption, by the evident analogy of the metaphor, presupposes a right to the souls of those who have been bought with a price.

The tenderness of our high priest, therefore, is a sufficient motive for coming boldly to the throne of grace for the remission of sins, and the gift of eternal life; but neither authorizes us to entertain any hope, while we remain alienated from him in affection and pursuits; nor warrants our continuing in sin, that grace may abound.

CHAPTER IX.

The Prudence of Christ's Ministry.

The gospels ascribe to our Lord several express directions with respect to the prudence to be observed in the discharge of ministerial duties. Of this nature are the following passages.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men .... when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?"[1] From these texts we must infer the importance of such a cautious observance of characters, and times, and places, as may prevent the reflection of unnecessary offence on the christian ministry,

[1] Matt. vii. 6; x. 16, 17. 23; xxiv. 45.

by an imprudent zeal not sufficiently tempered by circumspection and judgment.

Such a spirit was eminently needed by our Lord, as the prophet of a new dispensation. With every man's hand against him; with the brethren even of his own household for his foes; without a friend with whom he could take sweet counsel in his difficulties; deprived of the ordinary sources of human sympathy, which sustain and strengthen the mind in its moments of dejection; surrounded by men of different sects, who, though they disagreed on every other subject, conspired together in seeming harmony, and dissembled their personal animosities, for the purpose of indulging their common hatred against Christ; it was necessary for him to weigh every act and word with no common attention, and to sit as it were in previous judgment on every thing, which would fall under the observation of his adversaries. That he stood the test of such an ordeal, is a strong internal evidence of his divine mission. Subject a teacher, whose pretensions are merely human, to the same trial; and his incompetency to support it will be at once apparent.[2]

[2] "In persons of remarkable activity, who are constantly engaged in one duty or another, and who are thereby thrown into situations of difficulty and temptation, how hard is it to keep free from blame! Something is hastily said; something

With regard to our Lord, however, it is certain, on the authority of witnesses who were never contradicted during their lifetime, and whose credit has remained unimpaired in spite of the attacks of the enemies of christianity in succeeding ages, that, after the most diligent inquiry which malice could suggest, a ministry of three years duration furnished to its determined opponents no plausible ground of complaint, on which an accusation could be founded with any tolerable hope of success. Had there been so much as a single ebullition of intemperate zeal, it would have marked out the offender as an enthusiast and fanatic, who required to be put down by the strong arm of the law out of regard to the security of the public. On the other hand, had there been any appearance of lukewarmness in advocating the subject of his ministry, a pretext would have been furnished for rejecting the gospel, on account of the apathy with which it was offered to the acceptance of

is unwisely done; a reproof is given without due consideration; a reply is too bitter. Into the few years of the ministry of Christ is compressed a greater portion of good works, and active services, than can be found in the protracted life of the man who dies at threescore years and ten; and who has served God from his youth. But no imperfection is to be found."—*Bogue on the Divine Authority of the New Testament,* chap. i. sect. 2.

the world; or, had there been any ambiguity in its terms, it might have been alleged, that the incredulity of the people was owing to the mysterious mode of introducing the revelation, and the want of clearness or simplicity in its conditions. Or, lastly, the conduct of our Lord would have been still more open to objection, had it appeared to the political governors of the nation, that there had been tampering with the multitude, to induce them to throw off their temporal allegiance; or if the most trifling expression could have been quoted, which would bear an interpretation hostile to the ruling powers, or could be construed into a wish to change the order of civil government established at the time of our Saviour's advent.

That Christ should have escaped all these dangers, can be ascribed to one cause alone—to "the grace of God which was upon him"[3]—to the spirit of wisdom and prudence given him from above, and which, as the Son of God, equal to the Father as touching his godhead, he enjoyed without measure.

Some instances of our Lord's prudential discharge of his ministerial duties will place the truth of the preceding observations in its proper light.

[3] Luke ii. 40.

I. A remarkable distinction must have been noticed between the manner in which Christ testified respecting himself at different times, and to different persons. The Jews demanded of him with an earnestness not unreasonable,— "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."[4] And on other occasions similar questions were put, with the avowed intention of drawing from him a declaration of the true nature of his character. "Who art thou; whom makest thou thyself?" "Art thou the Christ? tell us." "Art thou the Son God!"[5] To these challenges our Lord uniformly declined giving any explicit answer; generally reminding the inquirer of some testimony which had been given at another time, or else referring to collateral evidences respecting his mission, which, if rightly understood, would make any further questions unnecessary. Even when the Baptist sent two of his disciples, asking,—"Art thou he that should come?"— he only replied by commissioning the messengers to go and shew John again those things which they had heard and seen, from which they and their master would be enabled to draw their own conclusions.[6]

[4] John x. 24. [5] John viii. 25. 53. Luke xxii. 67. 70.
[6] Matt. xi. 2

Compare with this reserve, systematically maintained towards the Jews, the passage, where our Lord openly declares his dignity and character to their neighbours the Samaritans. "The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ . . . . Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."[7]

No more probable reason can be assigned for this extraordinary difference, than that our Lord, knowing perfectly the secret dispositions of both parties, saw that he should have risked an inconvenience in the one case, which he did not incur in the other. He had nothing to apprehend from the habitual feeling of the Samaritans. There was no ground for expecting, that they would be excited to rebellion by the knowledge that Jesus was the Messiah; and therefore our Lord says to them plainly—"I am he." But lest the Jews, who were eagerly watching for an opportunity of throwing off the Roman yoke, should attempt to raise him to the throne of David, he not only avoids any express assertion that he was the Christ, but orders those, to whom the fact had been revealed, to conceal it. Or if he escaped this danger, he would encounter another not less

[7] John iv. 25, 26. The reason which Bishop Horsley gives for our Lord's openness on this occasion, appears less obvious and satisfactory.—See his first Sermon on John iv. 42. vol. ii. p. 264—268.

formidable. His enemies would have been furnished with evidence to prove the accusation, which, when they afterwards actually brought it against him, fell to the ground for want of proof. "They watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor." "And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king."[8] On how slight a pretence, or rather, in what direct contradiction of fact, such a charge might be raised, is evident from the case of St. Paul, who, after commanding the converts at Rome to "be subject to the higher powers," and declaring that "whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God," was thrown into prison by the Roman governor as a "pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition."[9]

The same system of precaution, which governed our Lord on these occasions, had been adopted by him from the commencement of his preaching. At an early period of his ministry, when umbrage was taken by the Jewish rulers at the numbers who flocked to him, "he left Judea

[8] Luke xx. 20; xxiii. 2.

[9] Rom. xiii. 1, 2. Acts xxiv. 5.

and departed into Galilee," where their influence was not so great, in order to avoid their envy.[1]

It might be apprehended, however, that the line of conduct pursued by our Lord, in maintaining this reserve, would expose him to a charge of a different kind, which, however frivolous, might be not less prejudicial to the object of his mission, and dangerous to his personal safety. His enemies might allege, with some colour of plausibility, that he taught one doctrine in private, and another in public; and that, although he prudently forebore to bring forward invidious topics when surrounded by numerous witnesses, his communications to his followers, when free from observation, were of a very different character.

That an accusation of this nature would have been entertained without difficulty, had the slightest pretence been afforded for it, is abundantly certain from the odium, which, in the first ages of christianity, attached to the primitive believers on account of their love feasts. But not even Judas, the familiar companion of our Saviour's retirements, who would have gladly treasured up in his memory any unguarded expression which had escaped from his lips in the moments of privacy, dared to breathe against his

[1] John iv. 3. See similar instances of his withdrawing from apprehended tumult, Matt. xiv. 22. John vi. 15.

master an imputation, which would have been so much at variance with the uniform prudence of his behaviour. Against the possibility of such an allegation our Lord protected himself by the openness and boldness with which he taught; not avoiding the tables of his enemies; generally choosing opportunities when the greatest crowds might profit by his ministrations; and never willingly affecting secrecy and concealment. Hence, when the high priest asked Jesus of his disciples and doctrine, he confidently appealed to the notoriety of the matter of his teaching, and to the number of his Jewish hearers. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing."[2]

Nor was the obligation to secrecy which he imposed on the cleansed leper,[3] and in some other instances, an exception to this conduct. On the contrary, the injunction, as Dr. Hales has well observed, was founded in consummate prudence. "For the purposes of his divine mission it was necessary that he should perform many miracles to command attention, and hold many discourses to instruct the multitude, and discipline or train his disciples for their future

[2] John xviii. 19, 20.

[3] Matt. viii. 4; ix. 30; xii. 16, &c.

functions. Hence, in the beginning of his ministry especially, he was obliged to keep himself as private as its nature would admit, in order to avoid giving umbrage to the ruling powers by a premature celebrity."[4]

II. We are told by St. John, that "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples."[5] There must have been some particular reason for his abstaining from the celebration of a rite to which he submitted in his own person, and for which he himself prescribed an express form of words. This reason may be found with great seeming probability in the dictates of that wise prudence which Christ possessed so abundantly. Had he acted otherwise, prejudices might have arisen, which it would have been difficult to obviate. The converts might have considered the agent by whom the rite was conveyed, rather than the rite itself. Distinctions would have been likely to be taken between those whom Christ had admitted himself, and those whom his apostles and ministers baptized afterwards. Some superior degree of perfection would perhaps have been attributed to one class, and doubts might have been insinuated respecting the satisfactory initiation of the other. Something of this kind

[4] Quoted in Mant and D'Oyly's Bible, on Matt. viii. 4. See also note on Mark i. 44.

[5] John iv. 2.

seems actually to have occurred at Corinth, which caused Paul to declare his joy, on jealousies arising among the followers of the several teachers, that he could recollect but few whom he had himself baptized in person.[6]

III. Our Lord's prudence was very conspicuous in another particular. As a preacher of righteousness to a corrupt generation, faithfulness in his ministry would expose him to give great offence to sinners, who could not bear to have their faults openly represented without extenuation. If there was any mode by which this obstacle to his usefulness could be lessened or removed, it would be of obvious advantage to adopt it; or if he could engage on his side any authority, to which his hearers would defer out of habitual reverence, a great point would be gained towards their conviction.

This mode was discovered, in some degree, through the medium of the Jewish scriptures. The weapons of their own armoury were used against themselves, and they were often instructed or reproved out of their own law. The sermon on the mount abounds with instances of this practice. When our Lord was about to urge any obnoxious topic, likely to experience a more than ordinary share of opposition, he expressed

[6] 1 Cor. i. 14—16.

himself sometimes in the very words of, sometimes with reference to, a metaphor employed by one of the prophets. Thus when he declared that the victims of divine justice would be "salted with fire," and preserved for everlasting punishment throughout eternity, there is an allusion to the manner in which the burnt-offerings under the Mosaic law were ordered to be prepared for the altar.[7] Hence the Jews were reminded indirectly of the typical meaning of their own sacrifices, and led to acquiesce in their concealed analogy with the divine decrees respecting sinners. So too, when the Pharisees objected to his eating with publicans and sinners, he answered them with the text of Hosea, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."[8] He sent away the young ruler convicted of worldly-mindedness by a reference to the moral law.[9] On the disciples being charged with transgressing the traditions of the elders, he defended them by proving, that, by those very traditions, which they valued so highly, they had made the commandment of God of none effect.[1] When a breach of the sabbatical law was imputed to him, he confuted his accusers by appealing to the very authority for which

[7] Mark ix. 49, 50, compared with Levit. ii. 13.

[8] Matt. ix. 13, compared with Hosea vi. 6.

[9] Matt. xix. 16—22.

[1] Matt. xv. 2—6, compared with Exod. xx. 12, and xxi. 17.

they were so jealous. "Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred? . . . . . Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?"[2] On another occasion, when the same charge was brought, he reproved and silenced, if he did not convince, the Jews, by reminding them, that they had no scruple to circumcise their children on the sabbath, if it happened to be the eighth day from the birth.[3]

On a similar principle, when our Lord controverted the objections raised by the Sadducees against the resurrection, instead of appealing to the prophets, or other books of scripture, which, if not rejected by them, were at least held in inferior regard, he chose a passage from the Pentateuch for their conviction, and reminded them by name of him, whose authority they would themselves acknowledge to be the highest on a subject of this nature. "Have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"[4]

Analogous to this mode of producing convic-

[2] Matt. xii. 3—5, compared with 1 Sam. xxi. 6, and Numb. xxviii. 9. See also John x. 34.

[3] John vii. 22.

[4] Mark xii. 26.

tion on the minds of prejudiced hearers, was our Lord's frequent habit of reasoning from allowed premises. He argued from truths which his adversaries admitted; and thus conducted them to conclusions most opposite to their own wishes and declared opinions.[5] Such was the use he made of the parable of the householder. It was not until the Pharisees had been led on to make the application against themselves, that "they perceived that he spake of them."[6] Of the same kind was his appeal to the disciples—"Ye call me master, and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."[7]

[5] See Matt. xii. 1—12; xix. 3—9. 16—22; xxi. 23—27; xxii. 16—22.

[6] Matt. xxi. 33—45.

[7] John xiii. 13. The word translated "master," should rather be "the teacher"—ὁ διδασκαλὸς. The emphatic article is added to both the substantives—ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ διδασκαλὸς—shewing that the titles are applied to our Lord in a peculiarly energetic and significant sense. The names of respect given to Christ in the gospels with reference to his character of teacher are three: 1. "Rabbi"—the highest title applied to the preceptors in the Jewish schools, to which the most apposite term in the Greek language is διδασκαλὸς, and so it is interpreted by St. John, (i. 38.) for the use of his Greek readers. 2. "Rabboni"—which is the Syriac rabban, a word seemingly used to denote rabbi of eminence, "with the addition of the affix of the first person, and accommodated to the

Nearly allied to our Lord's method on these occasions, was the manner in which he repelled the temptations of Satan. He accepted the challenge, and foiled him at his own weapons. Satan founded his arguments on passages of scripture distorted and misapplied. Christ combated them by quoting in reply texts, which were really applicable to his situation and character.[8] Thus being "ready always to give an answer to every man,"[9] his reproofs were attended with less offence; and their effect was strengthened by the sanction of an authority, which his opponents on their own principles were bound to respect.

IV. This subject will receive further illustration from the care of our Saviour in avoiding exposure to unnecessary risk.

Prudence as often consists in preventing danger by a previous arrangement, as in knowing how to meet it when it becomes unavoidable. The prejudices of the disciples in favour of Christ's temporal sovereignty, and their ambitious views, would have led them to co-operate gladly with any movement of the people, having the making him a king for its object. When therefore such

pronunciation of Judea." (See *Campbell On the gospels*, vol. i. p. 437.) It is twice applied to our Lord, Mark x. 51; John xx. 16. 3. "ὁ διδασκαλὸς"—John xiii. 13, &c. &c.

[8] Matt. iv. 4. 7. 10. [9] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

a feeling manifested itself after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Christ obliged the twelve to depart immediately without him, lest they should be tempted to concur in the design which was apparently forming—"Straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude away."[1]

Again: though ready to lay down his life for sinners at the appointed season, yet he would on no account precipitate his hour before all was "finished," and therefore withdrew himself privately from the parts, where the malice of his enemies would be most likely to prevail against him. In charity to the blindness of their rage against him, he took from them the occasion of sin. When they sought to take him at Jerusalem, "he escaped out of their hand" by an exertion of miraculous power.[2] Yet not long after we find him, to the great surprise of his disciples, who remembered the late attempt against his life, proposing to them to go into Judea again, that he might awaken Lazarus out of sleep within less than two miles of Jerusalem itself.[3]

So too, when his time was "fully come," his face

[1] Matt. xiv. 22, compared with John vi. 15.

[2] John x. 39. See also Matt. xii. 14—16.

[3] John xi. 7, 8.

was stedfastly set towards Jerusalem: whereas, before, he "abode still in Galilee,"[4] and would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.[5] Sending forward, therefore, his disciples to the passover, he declined accompanying them openly, lest he should attract premature attention. A spirit of ostentation would have dictated a different policy. His voice would have been heard in the streets—he would have courted popular support—he would have sought the assistance of a party, or have challenged the death of a martyr. But, after eluding observation as long as he thought necessary, "about the

[4] "The wisdom of our Lord's choice of Capernaum," a city of Galilee, "(after he had left Nazareth,) as his fixed place of residence, is evident on many accounts. He placed himself by so doing under the protection of the nobleman whose son had been healed, (John iv. 46,) and whose presence was an undeniable testimony to his almighty power. Capernaum, from its situation, being surrounded with numerous and populous towns and villages, on the border of the sea of Galilee, or lake of Tiberias, enabled him to remove with the utmost facility, either by sea or land; either for the purpose of instruction, or to avoid the persecutions, the importunities, or the efforts of his adherents, to make him their king."—*Townsend's Harmony of the New Testament*, chap. iii. sect. 5. See also *Gresswell*, Dissert. viii. part 2.

[5] John vii. 1. 9. "It is not said he durst not, but he would not, walk in Jewry. It was not through fear and cowardice that he declined it, but in prudence, because his hour was not yet come."—*Henry* in loc. See also *Bishop Horsley's Sermon* on John iv. 42.

midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught" publicly.[6] Had he wished to save his life, he could not have adopted a more prudent precaution for his purpose, than by his private journey. Yet, while the danger was still impending, he did not shrink from the open exercise of his functions when his Father's business required it. Having fulfilled his temporary object, he ceased at once to provide for his safety, and manifested to the world by his appearance in the temple, that a desire to escape from personal violence had suggested no part of his previous conduct.[7] "None of those things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy."[8]

The reasons which prevailed with our Lord to prevent his incurring unnecessary danger, would equally induce him to avoid whatever would give unnecessary offence.

As the tribute money collected for the use of the temple was designed for the service of God, the Son of God would have been duly exempted from the usual payment by an argument drawn

[6] John vii. 14.

[7] "Though our Lord determined to go to the feast, in obedience to the divine command, yet he went privately to avoid the danger; shewing in this manner, that he would not use a miraculous power to escape the designs of his enemies, when human prudence would serve."—*Dr. Clagett,* on John vii.

[8] Acts xx. 24.

from the practice of earthly sovereigns. He preferred, however, resorting to extraordinary means for obtaining the required sum, rather than avail himself of his prerogative of freedom as being not a "stranger," but one of "the children." "Notwithstanding," said he, "lest we should offend them .... thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them for thee and me."[9] He scrupled not to "offend them," when the offence involved the faithfulness of his preaching;[1] but where nothing more than a secular and private interest was at stake, he leaves his followers a lesson of self-denial and of renunciation even of legitimate rights, for the gospel's sake.

In the case of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, so silently and unostentatiously was the cure performed, that he who was healed knew not the name of his benefactor, "for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place."[2]

The lepers whom our Lord cleansed were dismissed with an injunction to comply with the observances of the ritual law, without mention-

[9] Matt. xvii. 24—27.

[1] Matt. xv. 12, 13. See St. Paul's precept, Rom. xiv. 13; 1 Cor. viii. 13; x. 32; and his practice, Acts xx. 33, 34; xxi. 26; 2 Cor. xi. 9; 1 Thess. ii. 9; 2 Thess. iii. 8; and especially in the circumcision of Timothy, Acts xvi. 3.

[2] John v. 13.

ing from whom they had received the benefit; lest they should increase the jealousy existing against him by spreading his fame.[3]

The whole of this systematic attention to the dictates of human policy, shews that Christ did not usually employ the divine power with which he was endowed for the purpose of rendering himself independent of the precautions suggested by prudence. He preferred on all practicable occasions the use of ordinary means to the working of a miracle in his own behalf, that he might leave behind him a pattern of virtues, within the reach and fit for the imitation of mankind in general.

V. It is a mark of no ordinary judgment to know when to reprove and when to be silent—where forbearance should end, and restraint begin. It often happens, that zeal in this respect hurries men into rashness, or that caution degenerates into timidity or indifference. Our Lord stands as a beacon between both extremes; equally removed from intemperate warmth on the one hand, and from supineness on the other.

It will not be denied, that the corrupt state of the Jewish world at the advent of Christ, required great faithfulness in pointing out, and great firmness in correcting abuses. The picture

[3] Matt. viii. 4. Luke v. 15, 16.

which St. Paul has drawn of the immorality of his countrymen affords an humiliating view of the licentiousness of human nature, when not under the restraint of divine grace. To remedy these evils was of course an important part of our Saviour's mission; and his mode of proceeding to effect this object deserves notice.

Now it appears, that, notwithstanding the general corruption which prevailed, no individual is held up to reprobation by name throughout the discourses recorded in the gospels, Herod alone excepted; whose crafty policy our Lord rebuked by a term indicating his knowledge of the designing tetrarch's character.[4] The scribes and Pharisees are rebuked with the greatest severity collectively—the rich are warned, as a class, of the difficulty with which they would enter the kingdom of heaven—the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done are upbraided, because they repented not—but there is a systematic forbearance with regard to particular persons, which it is impossible should have been the effect of accident. It is the vice which is named and stigmatized, but rarely the vicious person—it is the sect, and not its component members, which is exposed and held up to shame

[4] "Go ye and tell that fox," &c. Luke xiii. 32. When Christ tells his disciples to "beware of the leaven of Herod," he is speaking not of the individual, but of the sect of Herodians. Mark viii. 15.

—it is Chorazin, or Bethsaida, or Capernaum, or Jerusalem, and not their individual citizens, who are singled out and specified,—the generation at large, and not a part of it, which is reproached with unbelief, or mourned over on account of its obduracy.[5] Once when his disciples seem to have drawn unfavourable conclusions respecting the religious state of those on whom the tower in Siloam fell, he shewed his dislike of personality by turning their minds from an uncharitable and fruitless speculation, to a moral of immediate practical utility—"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."[6] Judging, therefore, of the nature of his discourses from the portions of them recorded by the evangelists, it is certain that nothing which could be construed into a direct or private attack formed any part of them.

Nothing can be conceived more likely to have promoted the ends of his ministry than such a course. It would make the fewest personal enemies, and conciliate most friends. It would leave such as were convicted by their own consciences, at liberty to come out from among their companions and to be separate, without bearing about them the taint of any reproach attached exclusively to their own individual character. They would have to surmount no private feelings or prejudices, because they had undergone no public disgrace, and had experienced no re-

[5] Matt. xi. 21. 23; xxiii. 37. [6] Luke xiii. 4, 5.

proofs, but those which they had shared in common with their sect at large.

If this forbearance be compared with the freedom with which Christ singled out objects of praise, the difference will appear so striking, that it cannot have arisen undesignedly. Of the centurion, whose servant he had healed, he said —"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." To the woman who touched the hem of his garment—"Thy faith hath made thee whole." Of John the Baptist—"among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater." Of the woman of Canaan—"O woman, great is thy faith." Of the woman who anointed him—"She hath wrought a good work upon me." Of one of the scribes—"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Of the poor widow—that she had "cast more in" than all the others. Of Nathanael—"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."[7] It appears, therefore, that our Lord never hesitated to give personal praise, however systematically he refrained from personality in blame.

The argument is not affected by the fact, that so few men of note among the Jews actually availed themselves of the easy terms, on which they might have withdrawn from the fellowship

[7] Matt. viii. 10; ix. 22; xi. 11; xv. 28; xxvi. 10. Mark xii. 34. 43. John i. 47.

of those on whom the woes were pronounced;—that Nicodemus among the rulers, and Joseph of Arimathea among the rich, should be almost the only names, whose praise is in the churches, as honourable exceptions to the general unbelief persisted in by others of their rank or opinions. Our estimate of the prudence of our Lord's conduct must be taken without reference to the success it met with; and the more judicious it proves to have been, the deeper was the guilt, and the greater the condemnation, of those who refused to hear the voice of the charmer, though he charmed so wisely.

Again: there was an impartiality in Christ's discourses, which must have placed his character for independence on a high footing. He never spared the sin on account of the station or power of the sinner, so that even his adversaries confessed in his favour—"Thou carest not for any man, neither regardest thou the person of men."[8] It happens, that in the very next chapter eight several woes are pronounced against the chiefs of the Pharisees. But though thus bold in reproof, when the essential interests of religion were at stake, his general custom was to take no notice of men or their opinions, unless they interfered with christianity. He left the dead to bury their dead. He intermeddled with no

[8] Matt. xxii. 17.

unimportant matters, and suffered the men of the world to manage the things of this world according to the light of their own judgment in temporal affairs; without stepping out of his own proper province to legislate or decide in things indifferent.

This accounts for his silence on many subjects, where his authority would have been gladly quoted; and it affords, at the same time, an useful opportunity for christians to try their acquaintance with the spirit of religion, by comparing particular cases with the comprehensive precepts of the gospel. Where our Lord does not give express precepts, we can often gather his will from incidental conversations, or from general inference. He gave no opinion on several points of the highest interest to a christian community—he said nothing concerning slavery —nothing concerning political subjection to the Romans—nothing concerning the lawfulness of capital punishments—nothing concerning the comparative expediency of particular forms of civil or of church government; of particular professions; of particular modes of education—but he left it to the sagacity of his followers to collect from the general tenor of his doctrine, that it was the duty of every man to "abide in the same calling wherein he was called,"[9] until the

[9] 1 Cor. vii. 20.

providence of God set open a door of egress before him; and that the new dispensation was intended to be applicable to the world at large, and not to an exclusive community of ascetics, whose principles would require them to hold no intercourse with the rest of mankind.

VI. But Christ had not merely to contend with the natural and unavoidable difficulties, incidental to his ministry as the prophet of a new covenant. The evangelists mention, that, on several occasions, questions were proposed with the express intention of leading him to commit himself by the delivery of opinions, which should offend one or other of the contending parties. He might have evaded direct reply, or have declined taking any notice of topics introduced with an evil purpose, and not for the satisfaction of doubts honestly entertained by the inquirer; yet, as has been truly remarked, "we never find him, except on one occasion, when his very silence was eloquent,[1] refusing to answer with the meekness of wisdom, the questions, objections, and even cavils of his enemies."[2]

St. Matthew tells us, that the Pharisees and Herodians, after consulting together how they might entangle him in his talk, referred to his

[1] Matt. xxvi. 63; xxvii. 14.

[2] *Dr. Pye Smith's Scripture Testimony*, vol. ii. part i. p. 179.

arbitration the controversy respecting the right of paying tribute to Cæsar. Our Lord, taking their own admissions as the basis of his answer, neither gave them an opportunity of representing him to the people as an enemy of the Mosaic law and their liberties, nor to the Roman governor as the instigator of opposition to his authority. Nor was this all. He not only avoided the snare laid for him, but, on the one hand, condemned the worldly policy of the Herodians, who to please the ruling power were disposed to make religion subservient to their interest; and on the other, afforded no sanction to the rebellious spirit of the Pharisees, who, under the pretence of conscientious scruples, affected to deny the lawfulness of acknowledging the Roman government.[3]

The Sadducees met with no better success in a subsequent attempt on the same day. With a view of cavilling at the doctrine of the resurrection, they inquired whose wife a woman should be in the future state, who had been married successively to seven brothers. Christ contented himself with mildly rebuking their curiosity, by pointing out that the supposed difficulty proved, not the absurdity of the doctrine itself, but the want of spiritual understanding on the part of those who misconceived its nature—"Ye

[3] Matt. xxii. 15—22.

do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."[4]

It remained for our Lord to silence the Pharisees singly, and it seems that an opportunity occurred within a few hours of the former unsuccessful trials. Their learned men disputed, "which was the great commandment of the law." Some contended for the laws respecting phylacteries—others for those which regarded circumcision—others for those which regarded sacrifices. With this difference of opinions they came to Christ, desiring to know his thoughts on the subject. Lightfoot remarks the judicious management of our Lord in avoiding offence, by giving a reply which, while it magnified the moral law, would seem to do honour to one of their favourite Levitical institutions. "He suits an answer to him from that very passage, which was the first in the writing of the phylacteries—"Hear, O Israel"—he directs the eyes and minds of those who repeated them, to the sense and the marrow of the thing repeated; and that they rest not in the bare work of repeating them."[5] The evangelists, who generally give a simple record of facts, leaving others to draw their own inferences, in this instance notice the effect pro-

[4] Matt. xxii. 23—32.

[5] *Works*, vol. xi. p. 419.

duced by our Lord's reply—"No man after that durst ask him any question."[6]

The Samaritan woman, when talking with Christ, whom she "perceived to be a prophet," thought it a favourable opportunity to settle the controversy existing between her own nation and the Jews, as to the proper place of worship. The question appears to have been proposed in sincerity, and without any bad design; but our Saviour, evading any decision which might afford a subsequent triumph to either party, passed at once to the explanation of truths of a more per-

6 Mark xii. 34. See also Matt. xxii. 46. The question "Who is my neighbour?" Luke x. 29, was of a captious nature, intended to place our Lord in opposition to the authority of the doctors of the law. "Concerning the Jewish interpretation of Lev. xix. 33, their limitation of the word neighbour, and our Lord's address in avoiding the imputation of directly opposing their established doctrines on this head, see *Lamy, Comm. in Harm.* p. 220. Prohibitum est eos (Gentiles) a morte liberare, si de morte periclitentur, &c. (Comp. Lightfoot, in Luc. x. 29.) Tam impiam doctrinam si prima fronte impetiisset Dominus, clamitasset legis-peritus eum traditionibus doctorum adversari. Verum oculis subjiciens exemplum eximiæ charitatis, quam legis-peritus non poterat non laudare, sic eum constringit, ut teneatur contrariam et saniorem doctrinam suo calculo comprobare.—Conf. Doddr. in Luc. x. 33." *Bp. Law's Reflections on the Life and Character of Christ.* Another captious question is proposed and avoided, John viii. 3—11.

sonal and pressing interest—"The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . . . The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him."[7]

The conduct of Christ at another time has been well called a beautiful model of the meekness of wisdom. The chief priests, under pretence of asserting their privilege in matters relating to religion, asked from what source he derived his authority to teach; intending to bring him into the dilemma of standing mute, or of exposing himself to the charge of blasphemy. Jesus might have appealed, as on other occasions, to his miracles—to the voice from heaven acknowledging him as the beloved Son of God—to the witness of John—to the testimony of the prophets, compared with what they had personally seen and heard of his character. But Christ took the wise in their own craftiness, and retorted upon them their own device. He rather chose to offer in return another question to his opponents; which, if they undertook to reply to it, would condemn them out of their own mouths, or, if they confessed their incompetency to answer, would justify his own reserve by

[7] John iv. 21. 23.

their example, and absolve him from the necessity of satisfying their inquiry.[8]

Had the prudence, which our Lord manifested on all these trying occasions, been displayed on only one of them, it would have pointed him out as an extraordinary character; but when we see it never forsaking him, governing with perfect consistency every word and action, we can arrive at no other conclusion than that to which the scriptures lead us—"Never man spake like this man." "Truly this was the Son of God."[9] The same truth remains impressed on the mind, whether we survey him teaching, as in his parables, by implication rather than by direct address,—avoiding unnecessary decisions, as in the case of division of inheritance, and of the woman taken in adultery—referring to the practice of his opponents, as in the question whether it was lawful to heal on the sabbath-day—appealing to their own scriptures, as in the question respecting divorce—to their own understandings, as on their asking a sign from heaven—or to the private means of knowledge within the reach of the inquirer,

8 Matt. xxi. 23—27. Compare an instance of address somewhat similar, resorted to by St. Paul, Acts xxiii. 6, 7. Compare also the question put by our Lord in reply to Pilate's inquiry, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" John xix. 33, 34.

9 John vii. 46. Matt. xxvii. 54.

as in the instance of the lawyer, who was referred to the law, which he professed to study and explain, for information respecting eternal life.[1] All was considerate, all was wise, all was adapted to the reconciling character of his dispensation.[2]

Experience, however, shews that it is more easy to acknowledge the excellence of a model, than to transfer the spirit of it to a copy.

1. They, for instance, seem to have mistaken the example of Christ, who, taking his zeal for their pattern, overlook the prudence which accompanied it, and enhanced its value. Where a deep interest is felt in the eternal welfare of others, it is not unlikely that zealous affections will outrun judgment; and it is often forgotten how much depends, humanly speaking, on the manner of bringing forward unknown truths; and that in proportion to the strength of preju-

[1] Luke xii. 14. John viii. 3—11. Matt. xii. 10—12; xix. 3; xvi. 1—4. Luke x. 25—37.

[2] "The forethought, the consideration of circumstances, the adaptation of means to the desired end, the disposition of the several parts of his doctrine to their proper purposes, and to the class of his auditory, his determination under a choice of difficulties, his address in defending his disciples when accused, his apologies before the bigoted Jews, marked our Lord's wisdom. The human heart lay open before him; difficult questions and sudden turns only served to display his consummate prudence."—*Bp. Wilson's Evidences*, Lect. xvii.

dices to be removed must be the caution with which they are approached. There is a certain degree of captiousness always attendant on error; which, if it be not tenderly dealt with, will perhaps prove the most effectual obstacle to the work of improvement. That apostolical rule was founded on an intimate knowledge of the human heart, which calls on the Corinthian converts to "give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."[3]

Yet it is impossible not to observe, that an inclination sometimes exists to give a deliberate shock to opinions deemed erroneous, in a manner quite as uncalled for by fidelity to the doctrines of the gospel, as it is inconsistent with christian charity, and the practice of our redeemer. Fidelity to the doctrines of the gospel requires us to use the language of encouraging love, as much as the language of alarm and warning. Christian charity seems to demand, not indeed a dangerous indulgence to the mote in a brother's eye, but such a measure of prudence and tenderness in removing it, as shall not close it for ever against the true light. The practice of our redeemer seems to enjoin such

[3] 1 Cor. x. 32, 33.

gentle dealing as may eventually win to the truth, and save by a conciliatory appeal what would have been lost by precipitation and heat. Mr. Cecil says with his usual point and sagacity, "It is a foolish project to avoid giving offence; but it is our duty to avoid giving unnecessary offence. It is necessary offence, if it is given by the truth; but it is unnecessary, if our own spirit occasion it."[4]

The danger is, lest, in cultivating conciliation, we fall into a temporizing and latitudinarian spirit, and err from want of fixedness of principle or stability of character. There is something very specious and self-deceiving in the exercise of what, under the name of an enlarged charity, may in reality give an injurious countenance to error. Liberality is one of those ambiguous words which may denote either a virtue or a vice, according to circumstances. It is sometimes culpable indifference; sometimes self-denying forbearance, and a recognition of the lawful claims of christian liberty. Scriptural charity "believeth all things," "hopeth all things;" but will not compromise vital principles, or put in jeopardy the unity and fellowship of the church. St. Paul exemplified the extent and legitimate operations of the duty, when he became all things to all men, that he

[4] *Cecil's Remains*, p. 104.

might by all means save some.[5] But the same apostle also shewed that this duty had its proper limits, by withstanding Peter to the face when to yield the point at issue would have been unfaithfulness to his trust. A dogmatical and positive spirit, pertinacious in trifles, and jealous of contradiction, even on subjects where human judgments may not unreasonably differ, must be distinguished from that inflexibility which will not "give place by subjection, no, not for an hour," to false brethren, when the truth of the gospel is endangered. Separatists who do not "hold the head," or are under deadly error, cannot be placed upon the same footing as to treatment with conscientious opponents, who, though not with us in communion, are not against us on points of vital importance. There was certainly a great difference in the tone adopted by our Lord in his intercourse with different adversaries. Even all the Pharisees were not treated alike. It must needs be, that offences come; but it is because they are inevitable, that their number should be lessened as far as practicable. The question is, not how much can be effected at one blow, as it were, but whether, with less risk, a greater share of even-

[5] 1 Cor. ix. 19—23. See instances, Acts xxi. 20—26. 1 Cor. viii. 13; ix. 12, 15; x. 33. 1 Thess. ii. 9. 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9.

tual good may not be obtained, by not discarding from our ministry the wisdom of the serpent. Under the pretext of declaring all the counsel of God, and keeping back nothing that can be profitable, a disgust has been often excited, the effect of which has proved a bar to all future usefulness. Quesnel well observes that "there is a time to give way to the enemies of the truth, and a time to render it triumphant over them. It is a very great grace not to mistake in this matter, and to do nothing out of season." [6]

An early incident in the ministerial life of the excellent Fletcher of Madeley will furnish an illustration in point. It was about three months after his ordination that his first opportunity occurred of preaching in the country. His text was James iv. 4;—"a very bold beginning," says one of his biographers, Mr. Wesley. "It was not soon that he was invited again to preach in Atcham church. . . . . I doubt whether he preached above six times in six months which he spent in the country." [7]

Contrast with this the advice given to a young minister by an elder brother in the pastoral office, whose zeal and faithfulness throughout a long life place him above the imputation of being actuated by a lukewarm or compromising

[6] On John iv. 1—3.

[7] *Life of Rev. J. Fletcher, of Madeley.*

spirit. "A violent opposition against ministers and professors of the gospel is sometimes expressed by the devil's roaring, and some people think no good can be done without it. It is allowed that men who love darkness will shew their dislike of the light; but, I believe, if the wisdom and meekness of the friends of the gospel had been always equal to their good intentions and zeal, the devil would not have had opportunity of roaring so loud as he has sometimes done. The subject matter of the gospel is offence enough to the carnal heart; we must therefore expect opposition: but we should not provoke or despise it, or do any thing to aggravate it."[8]

Such were Mr. Newton's precepts; what his practice was, we learn incidentally from Mr. Scott, to whose change of religious views, as is well known, the correspondence and subsequent intercourse with his judicious neighbour at Olney, under God, were chiefly instrumental. "At a visitation, May, 1775, we exchanged a few words on a controverted subject, in the room among the clergy, which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse, but a day or two after he sent me a short note, with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted, and I gladly embraced the

[8] *Newton's Omicron*, Letter v.

opportunity, which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer;—God knoweth, with no inconsiderable expectations, that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastical delusions. . . . I wrote him a long letter, purposing to draw from him such avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences. The event by no means answered my expectation: he returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me: he declared, that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of his Holy Spirit: that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me; but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me, on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship. . . . . He shunned every thing controversial, as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions; except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy of

faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained; and concerning some other matters, suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my enquiry after truth."[9] Baxter's experience led him, in his later years, to adopt the same method. "I have perceived," he says, "that nothing so much hindereth the reception of the truth, as urging it on men with too harsh importunity, and falling too heavily on their errors; for hereby you engage their honour in the business, and they defend their errors as themselves, and stir up all their wit and ability to oppose you."[1]

The name of Henry Martyn can never be mentioned, except with the most unfeigned respect, by all who value earnest piety, and self-denying devotion. A more eminent servant of God, or a more honoured instrument of usefulness in the cause of religion, is not to be found in all the churches. One would have thought, that his academical reputation, his literary talents, his inoffensive manners, the sincerity of his opinions, and the known disinterestedness with which he sacrificed his prospects and the objects of his dearest affections at home, for the unenvied

9 *Force of Truth.*

1 *Extract from the Narrative of the most memorable passages of his Life and Times. Wordsworth's Eccles. Biogr.* vol. v. p. 563.

honour of being "suffered to be a missionary,"[2] would have been passports ensuring the decent attention, if not the respect and attachment of his companions on shipboard. It is impossible however to read, without pain and humiliation, the statements of the violent and unceasing opposition, which his mode of preaching encountered from many of the more intelligent part of the passengers, as well as from the seamen. "M——, coming in, said that many had become more hostile than ever; saying, they should come up to prayers, because they believed I was sincere; but not to the sermon, as I did nothing but preach about hell: I hope this portends good. . . . . Sept. 22nd. Sunday. Was more tried by the fear of man, than I ever have been since God has called me to the ministry. The threats and opposition of these men made me unwilling to set before them the truths which they hated; yet I had no species of hesitation about doing it. They had let me know that if I would preach a sermon like one of Blair's, they should be glad to hear it; but they would not attend if so much of hell was preached. This morning again, Captain —— said, 'Mr. Martyn must not damn us today, or none will come again.' I was a little disturbed; but Luke x. and, above all, our Lord's last address to his disciples, John xiv. 16,

[2] See his Diary. *Life*, p. 106.

strengthened me, and I took for my text, Psalm ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.' The officers were all behind my back, in order to have an opportunity of retiring in case of dislike. B—— attended the whole time. H——, as soon as he heard the text, went back, and said he would hear no more about hell; so he employed himself in feeding the geese. —— said I had shut him up in hell, and the universal cry was, 'we are all to be damned.'"[3] This opposition continued to increase till the end of the voyage. "The Sunday after this, presuming that it would be the last, Mr. Martyn addressed the ship's company in a farewell discourse. The occasion, it might have been conceived, was such as to preclude any disposition to ridicule, even in men pre-eminently disposed to scoffing and contempt. But those who had reviled him at first, continued to revile him to the very last."[4] The same ill success attended his preaching at the new church

[3] *Life of Martyn*, p. 127—129.

[4] *Life*, p. 174. In quoting this passage it is impossible not to subjoin the touching remark which this good man made in his private diary on this trying occasion. "It pained me that they should give a ridiculous turn to anything on so affecting an occasion as that of parting for ever in this life. But such is the unthankful office of a minister. Yet I desire to take the ridicule of men with all meekness and charity, looking forward to another world for approbation and reward."

at Calcutta. His first discourse caused a great ferment, and was exceedingly offensive to many of his hearers. A season of great irritation ensued; very warm personal attacks were directed against him; and another chaplain, one of Martyn's friends, found it expedient to adopt the plan of simply reading the Homilies to the congregation, with the view of quieting the spirit of disputation and controversy which began to prevail, and to leave the church to speak authoritatively for herself.

None can read the affecting memoir with which Henry Martyn's able biographer has enriched our ecclesiastical records, without feeling a conviction that a man, whose whole soul was penetrated with a spirit of tenderness and humility, when called upon to speak the truth to an ignorant and scoffing audience, would speak it in love. And this, Mr. Sargent assures his readers was the case. "I cannot enough deplore," he says, "the unaccountable loss of the introduction to that sermon preached by him on shipboard, on the awful subject of eternal punishment. The preference it expresses for other topics of discourse—the reluctance it avows in bringing forward the painful one then under consideration—the motives it exhibits—love and concern for those whom he addressed—would convince those who may have suspected him of

harshness, that if on this occasion he 'used the lancet, it was not till he had concealed it in the sponge.'"[5] Mr. Sargent says afterwards, in allusion to the question of discretion, "how far it were wise in him to preach upon the awful subject of eternal misery, immediately after an injunction to abstain from such a topic, is a question which may admit of a diversity of sentiment."[6] It is more than probable that the enmity of the natural man against the truth would have broken out into open opposition, more or less violent, had the preacher adopted a different mode of delivering his message. But, in looking at the result, it is difficult to repress regret that he should not have felt it consistent with ministerial faithfulness to break up the fallow ground with more caution. One would have desired to have seen the experiment tried of feeding first with milk; and thus gradually opening a way for the introduction of topics, which could not be heard with favour, or received with advantage, by minds in a state of violent irritation against them. It is far less easy however to imitate the virtues of Henry Martyn, than to carp at his failings, if failings they were; and he who questions the judgment of this devoted man of God, may well be diffident of the soundness and accuracy of his own opinion. Whatever be

[5] Preface to the Tenth Edition.

[6] *Life* p. 132.

the conclusion at which we arrive on this transaction, none will impugn the justice of his biographer's comment, that "the temper by which Mr. Martyn was invariably characterized, leaves no room to doubt that his conduct in this instance was influenced by an imperious sense of duty, and by the tender overflowings of love."[7]

It would be unpardonable also not to state that, from the period of his entrance upon his missionary labours, Martyn seems to have been a remarkable exemplar of prudence. As an instance, his conduct with respect to the native schools which he established at Dinapore deserves attention. "So much progress had now been made, that it became necessary to determine what books should be placed in the hands of the children who could read. To give them at first the book of the parables, which he had prepared for their use, would, it was feared, awaken suspicion in the breasts of their parents, who had already shewn much jealousy respecting his designs. He therefore deemed it the wisest measure to permit them to use one of the Hindoo books, after having had it previously read to him. It was a book which, if it did no good, could do no harm; as it was an old Hinduwee poem, on an Avatar of Vishnu, which it was impossible for the children to understand."[8] Subsequently he reaped

[7] *Life*, p. 132. [8] *Life*, p. 262.

the reward of his patient waiting. "One fruit of Mr. Martyn's prayers, and result of his prudence, was the successful introduction into his schools, shortly after this, of the sermon on the mount; and on the 21st of September he had the exquisite joy of hearing the poor heathen boys reading the words of the Lord Jesus. "A wise man's heart," saith Solomon, "discerneth both time and judgment." It was in this spirit of patient and dependent wisdom, that Mr. Martyn had acted respecting the schools; and it was the same rare temper of mind which prevailed on him still to abstain from preaching publicly to the natives; again and again did he burn to begin his ministry in Patna;—but again and again did he feel deeply the importance of not being precipitate. It was not, however, without much difficulty, that he checked the ardour of his zeal. He was determined to see what the institution of schools, and the quiet distribution of the scriptures would effect; and was convinced that public preaching at first was incompatible with his plan of procedure; whereas it was clear that a way would thus be opened for preaching, of which object he never lost sight."[9]

2. The example of Christ seems to teach, that as every religious topic is not always opportune, and every time not the proper season of reproof, so every offender is not the proper

[9] *Life*, p. 273.

subject of it. "Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." "He that reproveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot."[1]

Directions of this kind seem to refer principally to those who are notorious for profaneness or unbelief. The conduct of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch will shew the sense in which the apostles understood them. When they saw that the Jews were filled with envy, and spoke against their doctrine, "contradicting and blaspheming," they gave no further excitement at that time to their bad passions, but shook off the dust of their feet against them, and departed to another place.[2] It seems that in such cases the ministers of Christ are to take as their rule the saying of their master respecting some of the Pharisees whom he had offended—"Let them alone."[3] Silence and separation are the most becoming, and perhaps not the least effective weapons, with which such offenders can be assailed. Before the high priest our Lord "held his peace, and answered nothing." To Pilate "he gave no answer."[4] At another time, when the Pharisees had tempted him with an ensnaring question, that they might have to accuse him, he stooped down, and wrote

[1] Prov. ix. 7; xxiii. 9. [2] Acts xiii. 45—51.
[3] Matt. xv. 14. [4] Mark xiv. 61; xv. 5. John xix. 9.

on the ground, "as though he heard them not."[5] Times there will be, it is to be apprehended, in the ministry of too many of his followers, when it will behove them to imitate the very silence of their master. The world shews its enmity to the truth by making a man "an offender for a word."[6] "Every day they wrest my words," said David.[7] It is well if the christian minister has not to take up the burthen of the same complaint, and to beware of those who "provoke him to speak of many things; laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth."[8] Bishop Middleton shewed his knowledge of the dangers to which the ministry is exposed from gainsayers, when, in laying down rules for the guidance of his own conduct, he prescribed to himself cautions like these—"Be guarded in discourse, attentive, and slow to speak.—Be not forward to assign reasons to those who have no right to demand them."[9]

It may be asked, how the uncompromising character of John the Baptist's ministry agrees with this view of what prudence seems to require from the christian teacher. The severity and openness with which he reproved the Pharisees,[1]

[5] John viii. 6.
[6] Isa. xxix. 21.
[7] Ps. lvi. 5.
[8] Luke xi. 53, 54.
[9] *Le Bas's Life of Bishop Middleton*, vol. 1.
[1] Matt. iii. 7.

who flocked with seeming readiness to his doctrine, may appear at variance with the spirit of our Lord's instructions to his disciples, and his personal example. The terms, however, of John's address were very suitable to one, who spoke with the authority and penetration of a prophet,[2] but should be imitated cautiously by those who bear an inferior commission. His language served to teach this important lesson—that, when the profession of piety is common, it is incumbent on ministers to be careful how they sanction or promote the advances of hypocrites. It is of great consequence to true religion, that, after our Lord's example,[3] they should know how to sift the characters of plausible professors. At the same time it is peculiarly necessary to pray to the "Father of lights,"[4] for discernment of spirits, lest one who is not far from the kingdom of heaven should be discouraged, or a little one offended.

3. Our Lord reads another important lesson to christian ministers in his abstinence from touching on party topics, and from interfering in civil affairs or national disputes. The decision on the legal punishment to be inflicted on adultery, was not for him to settle.[5] The dispute between the

[2] See Isa. i. 10, and Matt. xxiii. 33.

[3] See Mark x. 17, 18. Luke ix. 59—62.

[4] James i. 17.

[5] John viii. 3—11.

brothers in the matter of their inheritance, was not for his arbitration.[6] His kingdom was not of this world.

It follows, therefore, that for a Timothy to "entangle himself with the affairs of this life,"[7] does not consist with the imitation of Christ. It is only in rare cases, for instance, that the functions of the magistracy will not interfere with the discharge of his spiritual duties. What would have been the judgment of Tertullian, who considered the office of the magistrate incompatible with the very profession of christianity,[8] had he been consulted whether it were lawful for the preacher of the gospel to "bear the sword," we can be at no loss to discover. "It is not reason that he should leave the word of God, and serve tables."[9] "As a man of God," said one who was himself worthy of that honoured title, "he must have no concern with politics and parties and schemes of interest, but must live above

[6] Luke xii. 13—15. [7] 2 Tim. ii. 4.

[8] *Ecclesiastical History of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries*, chap. v.

[9] Acts vi. 2. The biographer of Mr. Legh Richmond mentions his inaptitude for the secular duties of the ministry. "He was on a visit to his friend Mr. F., who excused his absence by saying—'I must leave you for an hour, Richmond, to do penance at our parish vestry.' 'If,' replied Mr. Richmond, 'it is penance to you, it would be a perfect purgatory to me.' "—*Memoirs*, p. 346.

them."[1] Generally speaking, reserve on these subjects must characterise the preacher in the pulpit, as well as out of it. There are seasons, doubtless, when it will become his duty to direct the attention of his congregation to the "signs of the times," in imitation of our Lord's occasional practice. No subject, however, which can be treated in a pastoral address, requires greater discrimination and tact, greater exercise of a sound judgment, greater precision in weighing the characters and situations of the particular auditors to whom observations of this class are intended to be addressed. Nothing is more to be dreaded than an indiscreet and rash plunging into things of which the generality of pastors can know very little but from conjecture; and when conjecture itself must be commonly founded on very limited and uncertain data. Still it scarcely seems to be the duty of the watchman on the city's walls to be always silent under all circumstances. We find our Lord continually inculcating vigilance in reference to approaching events; and if great national calamities may reasonably be expected, a preparation for them may avert much of their pressure. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished."[2]

4. Again, the preacher who aims at following

[1] *Cecil's Remains*, &c. p. 315. [2] Prov. xxvii. 12.

Christ's example, will be cautious in his choice of phraseology. The Lollards and the puritans have been justly reproached with the adoption of a peculiar language of their own; and there have not been wanting in any age men who have prejudiced the cause of the gospel, by mistaking the shibboleth of party and the common-places of religious profession for the essence of truth. "There are others," says Dwight, "who, when particular terms or phrases have become odious by being used and marked in the progress of a vehement dispute, adopt them still, either from choice or negligence; and thus warn their hearers beforehand to dislike whatever they are prepared to say. A third class select a phraseology calculated to persuade an audience that they hold unheard of and unwarrantable opinions; when, if they would use customary language only, their tenets would be found to differ in nothing from those which are commonly received. In this manner the preacher alarms his hearers, not concerning their sin and danger, but concerning his own heresy; and occasions an opposition literally causeless and useless."[3] They would do well to remember Jeremy Taylor's sound advice to his clergy—"In your sermons and discourses of religion, use primitive, known, and accustomed words, and affect not

[3] Sermon cliii.

new, fantastical, or schismatical terms; let the Sunday festival be called the Lord's day, and pretend no fears from the common use of words amongst christians."[4]

5. If "to find out acceptable words,"[5] be a suitable exercise of discretion in the preacher, discretion in his delivery of doctrinal truths becomes a duty of far higher importance. He is to keep back nothing, but he may lawfully consult fitness of time and season. He must not compromise, understate, or gloss over, any portion of needful instruction, but he is not at liberty to risk an increase of the offence of the cross, by the unskilfulness of his own mode of exhibiting the doctrine, or to rouse into opposition all the latent hatred which our corrupt nature entertains against the truth, by some intemperate statement to which he gives the name of faithfulness. What Dr. Chalmers has said with respect to the right mode of bringing forward one vital point of doctrine, may be applied with equal justice to the enunciation of every other article of the christian faith. "While we assert with zeal every doctrine of christianity, let us not forget that there is a zeal without discrimination; and that, to bring such a spirit to the defence of our

[4] *Rules and Advice to the Clergy of the Diocese of Down and Connor,* Rule liv.

[5] Eccles. xii. 10.

faith, or of any one of its peculiarities, is not to vindicate the cause, but to discredit it. Now there is a way of maintaining the utter depravity of our nature, and of doing it in such a style of sweeping and of vehement asseveration, as to render it not merely obnoxious to the taste, but obnoxious to the understanding. On this subject there is often a roundness and a temerity of announcement, which any intelligent man, looking at the phenomena of human character with his own eyes, cannot go along with; and thus it is that there are injudicious defenders of orthodoxy, who have mustered against it not merely a positive dislike, but a positive strength of observation and argument . . . . . The way, then, to assert the depravity of man, is to fasten on the radical element of depravity, and to shew how deeply it lies incorporated with the moral constitution. It is not by an utterance of rash and sweeping totality, to refuse him the possession of what is kind in sympathy, or of what is dignified in principle—for this were in the face of all observation. It is to charge him direct with his utter disloyalty to God. It is to convict him of treason against the majesty of heaven. It is to press home upon him the impiety of not caring about God. It is to tell him, that the hourly and habitual language of his heart is, I will not have

the Being who made me to rule over me," &c.[6] This is conceived in the spirit of that prudence which our Lord enjoined on his apostles—"Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves."[7] What our great prophet commended in precept, and exemplified by his own practice, ought not to be stigmatized as inconsistent with simplicity and godly sincerity, or as worldly wisdom, unworthy the pursuit of a christian preacher. All experience shews that "a man may be a good man, and yet be indiscreet; but he can hardly be a useful man. An indiscreet or imprudent minister will rarely do good at all; and will certainly do much harm. . . . Imprudence betrays a man into every headlong measure; and lays up abundant materials for sore mortification and repentance; producing multiplied evils, which must be regretted, but can never be repaired."[8] He indeed who checked the indiscreet zeal of Peter, and healed the ear of Malchus by a touch, can undo, if he pleases, the mischief caused by an imprudent disciple, and restrain the enemies of religion from gaining an advantage over him by his mistake. But we must not give offence that God may shew his power in the cure. The

[6] *Discourses on the Application of Christianity to the commercial and ordinary Affairs of life.*—Disc. i.

[7] Matt. x. 16.

[8] *Dwight*, Sermon cliv.

christian minister must keep his steps, and strive to abstain from all appearance of evil.

6. No part of the pastoral care requires the exercise of prudence more than the administration of reproof. Christ's ministry is not deficient in instruction for the discharge of this difficult duty.

When our Lord reproved the scribes and Pharisees for the hypocrisy which profaned their religious worship, he did it privately, and not before the multitude. But though rebuke was addressed to their ear in secret, what would be profitable to the people at large was not to be hidden in a corner. When, passing from reproof, he proceeded to rectify their corrupt doctrines, he "called all the people unto him," and bade them "hearken, every one of them," that they might not be led astray by the error of their teachers.[9] The same consideration was manifested, when our Lord rebuked Peter. The rebuke itself was given in the presence of the disciples only; but having finished it, "he called the people unto him, with his disciples also."[1]

It would seem therefore, that the precept applicable to personal offences, may be extended also to the case of pastoral admonition—"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone."

[9] Mark vii. 14. [1] Mark viii. 34.

If secret admonition fail of effect, awaken a feeling of shame—"If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."[2] But let no unnecessary notoriety be given to the offence. It may be for the good of the soul of the sinner, as well as for the honour of God, and the prevention of scandal, that the sin be covered, rather than exposed to the gaze of man. The effect of faithful admonition is best promoted by the charity exhibited in the manner of administering it. As Bishop Burnet says, "there may be ways fallen upon of reproving the worst men in so soft a manner, that, if they are not reclaimed, yet they shall not be irritated or made worse by it, which is but too often the effect of an indiscreet reproof."[3] The object is to gain a brother, not to wound him, or make the rent worse by an ill-timed or harsh exposure. The Psalmist says—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head."[4] A spirit of christian love is never more sweetly

[2] Matt. xviii. 15, 16.

[3] *Pastoral Care*, chap. viii. "The great secret lies in seeking the happiest opportunities; in exhibiting the gentleness, meekness, and forbearance of the gospel; and in evincing a desire of nothing but of doing real good to him that is reproved."—*Dwight*, Sermon cliv.

[4] Ps. cxli. 5.

exhibited than in the matter of reproof. It teaches of whom to speak, and what to speak; and, what is perhaps more difficult than either, when to be silent. As Henry Martyn says, "The way to know when to address men, and when to abstain, is to love."[5]

7. It is clearly our duty not to tempt God by acting as if we presumed on his interference in our behalf, by miraculous protection, when the use of ordinary means would be sufficient to extricate us from danger. Elijah fled into the wilderness, and was comforted there by an angel; and the church herself, under the figure of a woman, is represented in the apocalypse as seeking a similar refuge, "where she hath a place prepared of God."[6]

The evangelists have recorded only three instances of our Lord's preserving himself from violence by miracle; and, in each of these, a sudden irritation seems to have been excited against him, which, to a common observer, previous appearances gave little reason to expect. It was immediately after the people of Nazareth had borne witness to him in their synagogue, and "all had wondered," (as St. Luke expressly marks,) "at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth," that, on our Lord's asserting

[5] *Sargent's Life of Martyn*, chap. ii.

[6] 1 Kings xix. 4. Rev. xii. 6.

his right to work miracles where he pleased, a tumult arose, in which the whole assembly, who had just united in admiring and applauding him, unanimously took part—"All they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." Then it was, that in such an imminent danger, which no human precaution could have averted, he gave as it were a practical rebuke for their presumption in requiring him to shew among them the signs which had been wrought at Capernaum, by miraculously withdrawing himself from their hands—"He, passing through the midst of them, went his way."[7]

Two other occurrences of the same kind are recorded by St. John. One of them, like the last mentioned, took place in the temple, to the holiness of which it might have been thought respect would have been paid,—and at a peculiarly solemn festival, the day after the conclusion of the feast of tabernacles. It happened also, as in the other instance, that an unusual success had apparently attended the first part of our Saviour's discourse; for the evangelist calls attention to the fact, that "as he spake these words

[7] Luke iv. 28—30.

many believed on him." But no sooner did he proceed to assert the priority of his existence to Abraham, than, under pretence that he blasphemed, the Jews broke out into open violence, and attempted to stone him; "but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."[8]

The other case was under circumstances precisely similar—in the temple at Jerusalem, and at the feast of the dedication. Here, notwithstanding the sanctity of the place, and the motive which had brought the people together, the Jews "sought again to take him; but he escaped out of their hand," and avoided giving further offence by withdrawing to a distance, beyond Jordan. It would seem also, by the expression used by St. John, as if it were more than a temporary retirement of a few days, for, says the evangelist, "there he abode."[9]

None of these cases, therefore, afford any precedent for an unwarranted dependence on the interposition of Providence, out of the natural order of things. The answer of Christ to Satan is in point. "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."[1] The essence of religious courage is to face danger boldly in the path of duty; not to court opposition pre-

[8] John viii. 30—59. [9] John x. 39, 40.

[1] Matt. iv. 7.

sumptuously, or to draw the sword, like Peter, with an over-hasty and imprudent rashness. The prize of martyrdom is to the martyr for Christ in a christian spirit; to him who, while he exclaims with the apostle—"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy," adds also with the resigned Job—"all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come;"[2] not to him who casts himself headlong into danger, reckless of the consequences, in a sally of indignation, or impatience. It is possible for affections, even in a good cause, to be too zealously excited. There were not a few who offered up their lives in the name of the Lord, during the early ages of christianity, who may stand as beacons in this matter.[3] The instances are frequent of converts gratuitously rushing upon death, under the belief that they were guided by the same spirit which actuated St. Paul when he told the Philippians that he had "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ."[4]

[2] Acts xx. 24. Job xiv. 14.

[3] See Milner's remarks on the voluntary martyrdom of Ignatius.—*Church Hist.*

[4] Phil. i. 23. "This desire was tempered and controlled in the mind of the apostle by a feeling of implicit resignation to the will of God. He must abide in the flesh so long as his ministry could be useful to the Philippians; and it was

But the christian, and especially the christian minister, is often placed in situations where to retreat demands more grace than to advance, and where self-preservation serves God better than exposure to persecution. "To make a humble retreat is a thing sometimes more difficult to nature, than a stout and glorious resistance. That person follows God, who does not expose himself to suffering before the time. The residue of a pastor's life shews plainly enough, whether he retired out of fearfulness, or out of faithfulness to his ministry."[5] There is much of instruction in that fact recorded by the prophet, whose own safety was secured by the divine interposition, that when Jehoiakim would have taken Baruch and Jeremiah, "the Lord hid them."[6]

8. A few words remain to be said on another subject on which more difference of opinion may be supposed to exist. No question occurs more frequently, as a case of conscience, than the degree of separation from the world, which religion requires from her servants.

not for him to determine how long a period his usefulness would continue. Though he was prepared, though he longed for the summons to depart, he did not venture to anticipate it; and far from courting martyrdom, he employed all warrantable methods of preserving his life."—*Bishop Kaye's Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries*, chap. ii.

[5] *Quesnel* on John iv. 1—3. [6] Jer. xxxvi. 26.

Our Lord's example is often quoted to prove, that he was no advocate for an ascetic retirement from the pleasures of life, and that the cheerfulness of his general temper was at utter variance with unsocial habits.[7] These are truths which are acknowledged by all parties—the question is, how to draw the line of distinction for individual guidance, and determine the point, at which it becomes the duty of the christian to contend against the stream of custom. All admit the necessity of renouncing the pomps and vanities of the world; the difficulty lies in defining what are pomps and vanities. No man doubts the lawfulness of conformity in things indifferent—the dispute will turn upon what is, and what is not, indifferent. It was a very wise rule given by a pious man—"Be not peculiar in any thing which is not a case of conscience."[8] But the misfortune is that, where a Melancthon would not hesitate to make concessions, his opponents would feel it a matter of duty to resist

[7] Mr. Cecil, in admitting the example, subjoins a not unnecessary caution. "Christ is an example to us of entering into mixed society. But our imitation of him herein must admit of restrictions. A public man must avoid danger. If any one could go into society as Christ did, then let him go; let him attend marriage feasts and Pharisees' houses."—*Remains*, p. 231.

[8] *Life of Scott*, p. 203.

to the last extremity ;[9] where the conscience of one man sees no case at all, the conscience of another would be alarmed by an insurmountable objection. One man might go on his way with no misgivings, and with his eyes closed against a real danger ; while another may see the angel standing in the path, and turn aside at the warning.[1]

The question seems to be too often treated as one of mere expediency and calculation. The case is argued with regard to the *quantum* of individual danger, and not on the broad and universal grounds of principle. How often can general society be enjoyed, without bringing into peril christian moderation? How much can be withdrawn from religious study, from private occupation, from domestic obligations, and given to the world, without surrendering the heart and affections to the same master? How long can we act in union with the great mass of mankind, without lessening spirituality of mind, or injuring tenderness of conscience? But these are low considerations, which betray that God is served by such reasoners from a cold principle of duty, of which love does not form an essential constituent,—that a less strict service

9 See the account of the Adiaphoristic controversy, *Scott's Continuation of Milner's Church History*, vol. ii. p. 48, &c.

1 Numb. xxii. 23.

would be more congenial to their feelings, if within the pale of safety,—and that the least measure of obedience compatible with salvation would be gladly adopted. It is pointedly remarked by Quesnel, though in language influenced, more than is common with that writer, by one of the worst errors of his church, that "it is a very dangerous thing, for a man to be unwilling to do any more good, than just what he thinks precisely necessary to salvation. . . . . Men seldom consult casuists, but when it is to justify, if possible, their natural and corrupt inclinations."[2] The children of God must not "verge so near to the level of the world, as almost to wear the appearance of a neutral or equivocal order of characters."[3] Such considerations are also selfish; for they leave entirely out of view a very important part of the question—the harm which these concessions are likely to do to others, by lowering the standard of practice in the minds of men, who are already predisposed to depreciate it.

On the other hand, to mix with none but such as coincide in precisely the same views of religion, and pursue their object by the same steps, is neither to act charitably by those whom we

[2] On Matt. xviii. 21.

[3] *Dr. Dealtry's* Sermon on Tit. iii. 8—*The Nature and Tendency of Apostolical Preaching Considered.*

presume to be in error, nor in conformity to the analogy of God's dealings with mankind. Connexion with the world is a part of the trial of man, during his state of probation. Were it intended to be otherwise, the tares would be rooted out whenever they appear, instead of being suffered to grow together with the wheat until the harvest. Indeed St. Paul seems incidentally to decide the matter, where he gives directions to the Corinthians respecting a case of conscience which had occurred. He writes—"If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake."[4] Here is a possible occurrence supposed, of more questionable propriety than any likely to take place in a professedly christian country. The faith of the new disciple, perhaps scarcely grounded in the elements of the religion which he had recently embraced, would be liable to be shaken by the sneers of the heathen philosopher, or the reproaches of his former associate in the temple, the unconverted Jew. Yet St. Paul does not make it a point of duty with the primitive believer to decline all intercourse with a person of different opinions, though that per-

[4] 1 Cor. x. 27. Our Lord sat at meat in the house of an unconverted Pharisee, Luke xi. 37, and perhaps Luke vii. 36.

son were a pagan, or (what in the infancy of christianity would have been still more dangerous) an adherent of Judaism; he only lays down certain rules for the prudent governance of his conduct in a situation requiring the exercise of peculiar delicacy and discretion. He provides for behaviour consistent with his religious profession, in case he feels "disposed to go." The direction given to the christian wife living with an unbelieving husband is conceived in a similar spirit.[5]

But it is objected, that those who enter into what is called general society, are seldom influential men. If it be meant, that their influence is lessened with a certain portion of the religious world, the fact, if true, must be deplored as another instance of that narrowness of judgment, which conscientious persons sometimes betray. But the influence which is thus lost in one quarter, where perhaps it is not wanted, is more than compensated in another, where its weight will be felt most beneficially. Let any one look into the circle of his acquaintance, and determine, which of his religious friends is most useful in promoting the cause of Christ—the man who withdraws himself into his narrow and monotonous circle, guarded jealously from intruders of a different caste, and

[5] 1 Cor. vii. 13.

stepping out rarely and reluctantly into scenes where he may chance to encounter uncongenial sentiments;—or he who moves freely, yet circumspectly, cheerfully, yet with soberness and decorum—kept by grace from the contagion of evil communication—enjoying, without abuse, the legitimate blessings of this life, but without suffering them to steal on his affections or engross too great a share of his thoughts—not ashamed to confess his hope and calling, and letting his moderation be known unto all men—the light of an extended sphere, and the standard round which the timid or the undecided may rally—restraining the bad, by the respect which consistent christian behaviour always commands—persuading the doubtful, by the silent force of example—strengthening the good, by holding out the right hand of fellowship, wherever the interests of piety or charity stand in need of his concurrence.

If, however, there is a difficulty in establishing any general rule applicable to the point at issue, there are some particulars connected with it, which the laws of christian prudence seem absolutely to require. It is quite certain that any thing enjoyed to excess, or, what is the same thing, which leaves the mind in a state of dissipation whence it cannot be recalled to that composure necessary for serious thought, partakes

of the nature of crime. Christianity makes no sacrifice to the weakness of men in this respect. It is so far from flattering the selfish feelings of human nature, that it characterizes as worldly those who will not forego the gratifications of the senses, and expressly disclaims them as children of God—"All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."[6] The heart must be with God, not with the world. The habitual conversation must be heavenly, not of the earth.

And the reason of this is evident. If every thing were very good, as it was when the creator first beheld and blessed the world, every object around would remind man of God, and promote the beginning of a spiritual intercourse with him, which would be continued "face to face" hereafter, on closer terms of intimacy. All his pleasures would be pure, all his enjoyments innocent, all his desires moderate, and cautious, and regulated by a predominant feeling of love and obedience to his maker—every external object, which furnishes impressions to the mind, would exercise his gratitude, and suggest suitable thoughts of him, who "crowneth the year with his goodness," and whose "tender mercies are over all his works."[7] The world would be on the side

[6] 1 John ii. 16. [7] Ps. lxv. 11; cxlv. 91.

of God, and acquaintance with it would not lessen that relish for heavenly things, which, as it forms the principal enjoyment of glorified spirits in heaven, must be acquired in some measure on earth, to make us meet for eternity.

But it is vain to speculate on what might have been the case, had the world continued to the descendant of Adam, that garden of Eden in which the first created being was stationed. The contrast which the actual state of things presents, leads to this practical conclusion—that, on the one hand, no countenance is afforded by our Saviour's example for separating christians externally from the great body of mankind as an insulated sect. Their separation is to be that of the heart, and spirit, and object of life; they are to be not of the world; but if occasional freedom of intercourse with friends were altogether inexpedient, or every social meeting fostered of necessity a light and unchristian spirit, Jesus would not have "adorned and beautified" the holy estate of matrimony "with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought," at the feast in Cana of Galilee.[8] His prayer for the disciples was, that they should be filled with grace to withstand temptation, not abstracted from a state of trial—"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest

[8] John ii. 1—10.

keep them from the evil."[9] On the other hand, they are as clearly warned, that they must "be not conformed to this world"—that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God"—that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"—and that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."[1] No follower of Christ, with these texts before him, will venture into the scenes of mixed life, as into a friendly country, where every thing is to be enjoyed without restraint or caution; or without remembering that the world is a deadly enemy to true piety, and that grace alone can preserve the heart from its seductions, or the soul from its destroying power.

For the minister in particular, great circumspection is necessary. Even the nominally christian world is very observant of his conduct in this respect, and expects a degree of self-denial to be exercised, which it is far from professing to practise itself. Jealous eyes are on him, and he will often find it expedient, like his master, to "thrust out a little from the land," that the effect of his preaching be not injured by too unreserved a familiarity.[2] "The minister who would not have his people give into such worldly conformity

[9] John xvii. 15.

[1] Rom. xii. 2. James iv. 4. 1 John ii. 15; v. 4.

[2] Luke v. 3.

as he disapproves, must keep at a considerable distance from it himself. If he walk near the brink, others will fall down the precipice."[3] "If a minister take one step into the world, his hearers will take two. Much may be learnt from the sentiments of men of the world. If a man of this character who heard me preach should meet me where he would say, 'Why, I did not expect to see you here!' then he ought not to have seen me there."[4] Mr. Legh Richmond's diary contains some affecting proofs of the watchfulness which he exercised over himself in this respect. "I perceive," he says on one occasion, "too much compliance with worldly company and conversation; O my soul, if I give way to this, my usefulness will be much diminished." His concluding reflection is suitable to all, but specially applies to the christian minister: "Let me often remember that I renounced the world at baptism."[5]

[3] *Scott's Life*, p. 122. [4] *Cecil's Remains*, p. 117.
[5] *Life*, p. 71.

CHAPTER XII.

The Faithfulness of the Ministry of Christ.

The Jews would be led, through the medium of their own scriptures, to expect, in Christ's discharge of his prophetical office, a more than ordinary exhibition of ministerial faithfulness. Type and prophecy concurred in representing faithfulness as one of the essential features in the character of their Shiloh. It was typified in Zadok; of whom the Lord said—"I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind."[1] It was prophesied by Isaiah—"Faithfulness shall be the girdle of his reins."[2] After the days of his humiliation had been accomplished, John, writing in the Spirit, invests our Lord with this attribute, and distinguishes him by the name of "the faithful witness."[3] Jesus himself chooses the same title

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 35. [2] Isa. xi. 5.

[3] Rev. i. 5.

for the purpose of announcing himself to his churches—"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness;"[4] and he is described in the vision of heaven under the same appellation—"I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True."[5]

Further, the Jews were referred to Moses for an exemplar of Christ's faithfulness. They needed no argument to convince them, that the lawgiver of the old covenant had been faithful, of whom it was written, that "according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he;" and whose praise from the lips of God himself was in all the churches—"My servant Moses . . . . . is faithful in all mine house."[6] Accordingly the apostle takes advantage of their reverence for a character, held in estimation for sacredness as second only to their father Abraham himself, to exalt Christ in their eyes, and to represent the superiority of the prophet of the new dispensation, "who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house."[7]

It belonged, therefore, to Christ's faithfulness, that, like Moses, he should do all "according to the pattern shewed to him in the mount."[8] And

[4] Rev. iii. 14. [5] Rev. xix. 11.
[6] Exod. xl. 16. Numb. xii. 7. [7] Heb. iii. 2.
[8] Exod. xxv. 40, compared with Heb. viii. 5.

so David said of him in the Spirit—"I have set the Lord always before me."[9] Hence our Saviour frequently speaks of himself as the depositary and agent of God's will—"I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." "I do always those things that please him." "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself."[1] His conversations contain many incidental intimations of that familiar knowledge of the secret things of heaven, which furnished the materials for his faithfulness. Such are the following—"In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you." "They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world .... neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more, for they are equal to the angels."[2]

I. Christ's faithfulness may be said to have had its commencement in his obedience to the Jewish ritual. Although himself the author of

[9] Ps. xvi. 8.

[1] John vi. 38; viii. 29; xiv. 10.

[2] Matt. xviii. 10. Luke x. 20. John iii. 11; xiv. 2; xx. 35, 36.

a new dispensation, he fulfilled in his own person all the ordinances of the law about to be superseded.

Various opinions prevailed with respect to the change which the Messiah, at his coming, would make in the ancient religion. Christ put an end to these doubts by declaring, in the longest public discourse which he is recorded to have delivered, that his mission was to accomplish, not to subvert, or counteract, that introductory dispensation, which had so long served as "a shadow of good things to come."[3] His language is explicit—"Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."[4]

Considered indeed in his human nature, Jesus was morally bound to observe the legal obligations in force at the time of his advent. St. Paul lays a stress on this necessity—"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren."[5] Therefore, when the fulness of the time was come,

[3] Heb. x. 1.

[4] Matt. v. 17. On Christ's respect for the law of Moses, see Mark x. 3, 19; Luke x. 26; John v. 39. On his fulfilment of the prophecies, see Matt. xxi. 12, compared with Mal. iii. 1—3; Matt. ii. 5, 6, with Micah v. 2; Matt. ix. 4, 5, with Isa. xxxv. 5, 6; Matt. xxvi. 15, and xxvii. 7, with Zech. xi. 12, 13; Matt. xxi. 6, 7, with Zech. xix. 9; Luke iv. 18—21, with Isa. lxi. 1, 2; John xix. 34, with Zech. xii. 10.

[5] Heb. ii. 17.

"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."[6] Accordingly, though the "holy child Jesus," as not being born in sin, and having no taint of corruption adhering to him, needed no circumcision, and was himself about to introduce, in the place of that ceremony, an initiatory rite of a different description, yet he made himself "a debtor to the whole law"[7] by being circumcised the eighth day, conformably to the Levitical regulation.[8] As a firstborn son, he was presented to the Lord in the temple, and redeemed with the customary sacrifice from the inferior services of the sanctuary, although destined to be the high priest of a more excellent ministry, after another order.[9] His first public appearance was a mark of deference to the national institutions. At a certain period of life all the Jewish youths were required to be examined by the doctors of the synagogue with reference to their proficiency in religious knowledge. In compliance with this custom, when he was twelve years old, and had gone up with his parents on their annual journey to the paschal feast at Jerusalem, he took the opportunity of submitting himself to the masters of Israel, and was found "in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them

[6] Gal. iv. 4. [7] Gal. v. 3. [8] Luke ii. 21.
[9] Luke ii. 22—24.

and asking them questions."[1] After this event he returned to his home, and again honoured the law by being "subject," as an ordinary son of mortality, to his earthly parents.[2]

This conformity of our Lord was not limited to the commencement of his course. The gospels concur in representing his obedience to the Jewish ordinances as complete and universal, even after his entrance upon his own ministry. From first to last, he who was prefigured in all the observances of the ceremonial worship, and whose doctrines were finally to supersede the preparatory commandments of Moses, deferred to the whole law, whether ritual or moral, in all its branches. His first recorded saying, after his unction to the prophetical office, was a quotation from the Old Testament.[3] Even in unimportant particulars he conformed to the established rules of the synagogue, "standing up for to read," as a member of his own congregational place of worship, and sitting down to expound, according to the usual practice, when he had closed the sacred volume.[4] "His custom was" to frequent the synagogues.[5] He went up periodically, not only to the feasts of divine institution, but even

[1] Luke ii. 46. See *Le Bas's Sermon* on Luke ii. 52. vol. i. p. 5.

[2] Luke ii. 51.

[3] Luke iv. 4.

[4] Luke iv. 16—20.

[5] Luke iv. 16.

to those commanded by human authority. St. John tells us that, at Jerusalem, at the feast of the dedication, "Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch."[6] He attended to all the circumstantial rites of the passover in their prescribed order,[7] though he was himself about to be offered as "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world."[8] He observed the seventh-day sabbath, though the day hallowed to God was so

[6] John x. 22. This festival was appointed in commemoration of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabeus. 1 Mac. iv. 59. *Joseph. Antiq.* b. xii. ch. ii.

[7] "He (St. John) gives an account of his going up to the passover; and unless there may be some scruple about the third, from John vi. he resorted to all between his baptism and his death. Now in all the evangelists you cannot find, that when he came there, he differed the least tittle from the custom and order that was constantly used by the church at that solemnity. Nay, they that are versed in the Jews' records, and see their customs there, may shew you how he followed the rubrics and ritual of that passover from point to point. His manner of sitting at the table—his beginning the meal with a cup of wine—his ending it with a cup of blessing—his using bread and wine—his concluding with a psalm; and indeed his whole demeanour at the meal, compared with the Jews' rubric and custom for the solemnity, does clearly speak that he kept close communion with the whole church in that great symbol of communion. He that was to be the paschal lamb himself, and to fulfil what the typical ordinance signified, would not, might not, confound or cross the constant received order of that solemnity."—*Lightfoot's Works,* vol. vi. p. 221.

[8] Rev. xiii. 8.

soon to take its date from that important event which proved beyond all doubt the reality of his own Messiahship, and to be distinguished with peculiar honour by the name of "the Lord's day."[9]

But, further, being about "thirty years of age," the exact period when the Levitical priests entered on their office,[1] Christ was anointed to his priestly commission, as Aaron, the first Jewish high priest, was consecrated to the exercise of his functions.[2] He needed no forgiveness or regeneration; but in submitting to the baptism of John, he taught the lesson that "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."[3] And, at the end of his ministry, as the Jewish high priest offered up atonement for himself and all his family, so too the captain of our salvation, when about to finish his course, notwithstanding that his priesthood was superior to that of Moses, (inasmuch

9 Rev. i. 10. Bishop Sherlock has remarked in the fourth Dissertation annexed to his Discourse on Prophecy, that our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem, riding on an ass, was an instance of his strict observance of the divine law, God having forbidden the people of Israel the use of the horse in their armies. Deut. xvii. 16. See also Doddridge's Paraphrase of Matt. xxi. 5, with his note on that verse; and Bp. Chandler's Defence of Christianity.

1 See Numb. iv. 3. 23; Luke iii. 23.

2 Exod. xxiv. 4—7; Ps. xlv. 7; Acts x. 38; Heb. i. 9.

3 Matt. iii. 15.

as it was not successional but everlasting,) interceded solemnly for all his followers in that affecting prayer contained in the seventeenth chapter of St. John.[4] So fully did the prophecy of Isaiah receive its completion—"The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake: he will magnify the law and make it honourable."[5]

Neither did our Saviour exempt others, who came within the sphere of his influence, from paying respect to those ordinances to which he submitted in his own person. A patient, whose disorder had been removed by none of the usual means of cure, but who had been rendered whole by the miraculous exercise of those healing powers which were resident in the Son of God, might have considered himself relieved from the necessity of complying with the directions provided in the Mosaic law for ordinary cases. Our Lord therefore expressly orders the lepers whom he cleansed, to go and shew themselves to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.[6] The jealousy with which the Jews would have regarded any infraction of their religion, may be inferred from the disturbances which arose afterwards, when Paul and Barnabas were accused of undervaluing the obligations of the ceremonial law in the matter

[4] Levit. xvi. 17; Rom. vi. 10; Heb. ix. 26.

[5] Isa. xlii. 21. [6] Matt. viii. 4. Luke v. 14; xvii. 14.

of circumcision.[7] Christ therefore sets an example of submission, even in a case of doubtful necessity, for peace' sake; and puts honour upon the ordinances by providing for their observance, though on the eve, as it were, of their abrogation. Such indeed was the caution of Jesus in this particular, that he even enjoins obedience to those who were personally unworthy of respect, for the sake of the office they held, and in deference to the authority of their situation.[8]

II. I notice, secondly, the faithfulness of the subject-matter of our Lord's discourses. The care with which he abstained from giving unnecessary offence, has been remarked elsewhere. But this scrupulousness extended only to indifferent things, and never was suffered to interfere with the faithfulness of his ministry. When the case required it, there was as much plain dealing in his preaching, as, at other times, there was consideration for his hearers on subjects where respect to their feelings was admissible. In the very outset of his course, he entered at once, without circumlocution or delay, upon the subject most important, though not most acceptable, to his hearers—"From that time Jesus began to

[7] Acts xv. 1—30.

[8] Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. St. Paul complied with the injunction, Acts xxiii. 5.

preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[9]

Mark his faithfulness to the Jews. Nothing discouraged them more than the removal of their false conceptions respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingly power. Yet Christ never shrunk from declaring openly, that his "kingdom was not of this world."[1] They reverenced their law as final and perfect, obscured as it was by comments and glosses, and corrupted by traditions. In proportion therefore as they remained blind to the truth that the law was intended as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, and designed from the beginning to serve only for a preparatory dispensation, having, as it were, "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things,"[2] they would listen with impatience to a teacher, who annulled all distinctions of meats and persons, who abrogated long established rites and ceremonies, and who even robbed their temple of the honour of being the exclusive seat of the national worship—a privilege which it had enjoyed from the period of its dedication. But our Lord did not mould

[9] Matt. iv. 17. "Jesus begins his preaching, not by flattering men in their inclinations, but by that which is most necessary for them."—*Quesnel* in loc.

[1] John xviii. 36. Compare Luke xvii. 20, 21.

[2] Heb. x. 1

his doctrines to meet their views, that he might avoid giving them umbrage. Still less did he conceal the design of his mission, because the principles of the new dispensation interfered with the opinions which they had adopted under the authority of the old.[3]

The same explicitness characterised his discourses with the Pharisees. "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?"[4] asked the disciples in surprise, when our Lord had just uttered truths highly unpalatable to the corruptions of formalists in religion. Doubtless our Lord did know what would be the effect of his fidelity; and ministers may learn from the conduct he pursued, not to keep out of sight any essential truth, through fear of the enmity of the carnal heart against it. Christ did not leave the impotent man to perish, or refrain from asserting his own divinity, though he well knew that the Jews would seek "the more to kill him, because he not only had broken

[3] Archbp. Tillotson has been at some pains to shew the unreasonableness of the conduct of the Jews, by instituting a comparison between the Jewish and christian dispensations, wherein he follows the argument of the apostle to the Hebrews, and demonstrates how admirably the religion of Christ is calculated to supply the peculiar defects and imperfections of the law of Moses. Heb. viii. 7—10.—*Tillotson's Works*, vol. v. Sermons 104 and 105.

[4] Matt. xv. 12.

the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."[5] If the truth requires a martyr, we must be ready to sacrifice ourselves at its shrine. "He knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst."[6] He would not be frustrated in his gracious purpose by the known malevolence of the bystanders.

In a word, whatever was the scene, or whoever the hearers, Christ spake, with the most uncompromising plainness, truths which could not but be unpalatable to flesh and blood, whenever the fidelity of preaching demanded it. He uttered "hard sayings" in the hearing of his disciples, though there were some who could not bear them, and would go back, and walk no more with him in consequence.[7] Nothing offended the apostles so much as the idea of their Master's sufferings and death. Yet, though "sorrow had filled their heart," Christ was so far from avoiding these topics, that his conversations were perpetually directed to convince them, that it was expedient for them that he should go away.[8] Nothing could have been more likely to stagger the faith of new converts, than a vivid description of the persecutions they would be

[5] John v. 18.
[6] Luke vi. 8.
[7] John vi. 60—66.
[8] John xvi. 6, 7.

called upon to endure for righteousness' sake. Yet Christ foretold in the most explicit and undisguised manner the usage which they would receive from the world, as the recompence of their attachment to him.[9] Death itself was not concealed from their view, as the certain price of adherence to their despised and crucified head.[1] No encouragements were held out to self-indulgence or selfishness. The young man of "great possessions" was bid to sell all he had, and give to the poor; the rich were warned that they should "hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven;" our Lord's brethren according to the flesh were disappointed of their pretensions to extraordinary favour in virtue of their affinity—"Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother."[2] His ordinary demeanor to the constituted authorities was full of respect;—to Cæsar he himself rendered, and he enjoined others to render, the things of Cæsar,—and to the accusation of the chief priests and elders he answered nothing. But "before Pontius Pilate he witnessed a good confession."[3] And, when it became necessary to rebuke the crafty policy of Herod, he did not scruple to designate him by the strongest term of

9 Luke xxi. 17. John xv. 18—21.

1 John xvi. 2; xxi. 18.

2 Matt. xix. 21—24. Mark iii. 35. 3 1 Tim. vi. 13.

reproach that ever fell from his lips, intimating his secret knowledge of the deceitfulness of his character—"Go ye, and tell that fox, behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected."[4]

1. There never was a time in the history of our own, or of any church, when the imitation of Christ's faithfulness challenged more irresistibly the attention of the clergy. We are fallen upon days when it behoves the church to entrust her cause to none but those who profess themselves willing to take up the divine panoply, and buckle on the whole armour of God, and cry aloud unceasingly—Who is on the Lord's side? who?[5] The church cannot now engage in her service the blind, and the halt, and the lame; her servants must be unblemished—able ministers of the new testament—ready to give an answer to every man that asketh of them the reason of the hope that is in them—apt to teach—content to take patiently the spoiling of their goods for the truth's sake. This is no time for folding the hands in slumber, or for acquiescing in any low and cold standard of decent inoffensiveness. Let it be remembered that the Spirit of God bears testimony that the characteristic of a fallen church is lukewarmness.[6] These are not

[4] Luke xiii. 32. [5] 2 Kings ix. 32.
[6] Rev. iii. 14—16.

days when ordained members of our own church can afford to be neither cold nor hot. That church expects them now, if ever, to be much in prayer; to seek fresh supplies of grace daily; to ask and expect abundant ministrations of the Holy Spirit; to be much among the members of their charge, the whole as well as the sick, but especially among the sick and dying, whether in a literal or spiritual sense; to fear no face of man; to dare all for the sake of Jesus and his gospel.

But this is not all. The church holds them responsible for their doctrine. She is built upon the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. She expects them, therefore, to be faithful to their trust in this matter. She requires them not to depart from the simplicity of apostolical truth. She bids them preach the word, and nothing but the word. She would have them set forth and magnify Christ the Lord, and frame all their doctrines in the spirit and determination of the apostle, "not to know any thing among their people, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."[7] She calls upon them to promulgate distinctly, and vindicate from misconception, the grounds on which she rests her pretensions to the title of a true church. Now our church refers explicitly for her doc-

[7] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

trines to holy writ, and expounds the sense in which she understands it in her liturgy and articles. She desires to be tried by that standard, and admits of no other. She will hear of no human addition—no traditional rubric—no collective wisdom of councils. Her appeal is to the law and to the testimony, and by that criterion she is prepared to stand or fall. Hence she collects and embodies in her liturgical forms, and in the teaching of her faithful sons, such doctrines as these—the cardinal doctrines of our national creed. The guilt, corruption, and ruin of man—reconciliation with God through the incarnation and sufferings of our divine redeemer—free and full justification through faith in his meritorious sacrifice—the agency of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration, and in the progressive increase of the christian in all spiritual gifts—the obligations of the redeemed to holiness, as the fruit of a true and lively faith, and in respect of their meetness for heaven. These truths, and truths like these, the church expects her ministers to deliver, when she invests them with that holy commission—"Take thou authority to preach the word of God."[8] She challenges the whole counsel of God from their lips. She enjoins them to add nothing, and take away nothing from the words of the book,

[8] Ordination Service.

as they value their part in the book of life, and in the holy city.[9] She says to each—"Be thou faithful unto death,"[1] that, when called upon to give an account of his stewardship before the great shepherd and bishop of souls, he may cry joyfully—"O Lord . . . I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation."[2]

It is true, the ministers of Christ's ordinances cannot look for that high witness which Moses obtained, or hope to be accounted faithful in all the Lord's house;[3] yet, by God's grace, they may so approve themselves as diligent dispensers of his word and sacraments, as finally to hear from their master and pattern that gracious eulogy—"Well done, ye good and faithful servants . . . enter ye into the joy of your Lord."[4] With this prize of their high calling in view, fidelity to their commission must be the motto on their signet. The words with which they were admitted into the order of priesthood must ever sound in their ears—"Be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God, and of his holy sacraments, in the name of the Father, and of the

[9] Rev. xxii. 19.
[2] Ps. xl. 10.
[1] Rev. ii. 10.
[3] Numb. xii. 7.
[4] Matt. xxv. 21.

Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[5] Their very appointment calls upon them to be "faithful ambassadors."[6] They have been set in their place, like the treasurers whom Nehemiah constituted, on his reformation of the house of God at Jerusalem, because "they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren."[7]

St. Paul points the attention of the Corinthian converts to this qualification, and challenges their respect and love for the ministerial office in virtue of it—"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."[8] He himself was "one that had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful."[9] He pours out his thanksgivings to Christ Jesus for his distinguishing goodness in conferring this gift upon him, "for that he counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry."[1] There are not a few honourable names whom the scriptures associate with him in the same praise. Timothy,[2] Tychichus,[3] Epaphras,[4] Onesimus,[5] Silvanus,[6] Antipas,[7] are all mentioned severally as having gained the crown of faithfulness. They

[5] Service for Ordination of Priests. [6] Prov. xiii. 17.
[7] Nehem. xiii. 13. [8] 1 Cor. iv. 2.
[9] 1 Cor. vii. 25. [1] 1 Tim. i. 12.
[2] 1 Cor. iv. 17. [3] Eph. vi. 21; Col. iv. 7.
[4] Col. i. 7. [5] Col. iv 9.
[6] 1 Pet. v. 12. [7] Rev. ii. 13.

obtained this prize through the "grace given" them.[8] It was of the Lord, who "enabled" them.[9] Their confidence was built upon the fulfilment of the promise given of old to one of the special messengers of God, to whose faithfulness the Holy Spirit himself bears testimony—"Certainly I will be with thee."[1]

Faithfulness, indeed, is a term so comprehensive, in reference to the ministry, that he, who is deeply impressed with the dignity of his sacred calling, will be almost overwhelmed with a consciousness of his own unfitness to sustain the office of a "worker together with God."[2] In doctrine, and the application of doctrine, in the various departments of the pastoral work, public and private, in study, prayer, and meditation, in the cultivation of personal character, growth in devotedness, self-denial, boldness, who will venture to answer before God for his faithfulness in dispensing the ministry of reconciliation committed to him? A remembrance of the fear of Moses will be a salutary check upon his presumption—"Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"[3] "Woe is me," said Isaiah of old, "for I am undone; because I

[8] Eph. iii 8.
[1] Ex. iii. 12. Heb. iii. 2.
[9] 1 Tim. i. 12.
[2] 2 Cor. vi. 1.
[3] Ex. iii. 2.

am a man of unclean lips."[4] And who will dare to hope that he has found in himself a less polluted channel, a worthier vessel for the purpose of conveying divine truths to others? Whoever comes before the altar of the Lord with his strange fire in a censer so unhallowed, should recollect that it is his high privilege, as one set over the church, to represent the person of the Son of God.[5] A proper apprehension of this truth will place the ministerial commission in the light of a most honourable, but most awful trust—so full of obligations, as to leave no space for relaxation in duty, and so full of difficulty, as to call for the perpetual exercise of watchfulness, faith, and prayer. A christian minister is especially "not his own."[6] Not only is he "bought with a price," like all his brethren, but he is also "a man of God," and must be "about his Father's business."[7]

2. The faithful minister will often be placed in situations where his duty calls upon him to urge unpalatable topics. This is one of those trials of the mind, which form so peculiar a part of the difficulties attendant upon the pastoral

[4] Isa. vi. 5.

[5] "Magnum hoc et præclarum est, præfici ecclesiæ homines qui personam Filii Dei sustineant."—*Calvin* on John iii. 29.

[6] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

[7] Luke ii. 49. 1 Tim. vi. 11. 2 Tim. iii. 17.

office. It requires much fortitude to bring forward truths, which, we cannot but know, will be distasteful to our hearers. We are tempted to substitute in their place other doctrines, not indeed contrary to the gospel, but not so strongly opposed to the particular prejudices of our congregations. This is at variance with the apostolical model, as well as with the example of Christ.[8] The preaching of Paul before Felix would not have been contrary to the gospel, had he spoken only "concerning faith in Christ." But the particular cases of his hearers required a particular and discriminating treatment. In the presence of the Roman governor, who would have sold justice for a set price, and hoped that money would have been given him to free his prisoner, the apostle felt himself constrained by the faithfulness of the gospel to preach to him of "righteousness." In the persons of Felix and Drusilla, he saw before him the defilers of the marriage bed, and, not content with dwelling on doctrinal principles only, at the risk of being "left bound," he reasoned practically of "temperance and judg-

8 "He that was the first preacher of it, was the greatest example of suffering himself; and he bids his disciples not to think much of following their Lord and Saviour, though it were to take up the cross, and lay down their lives for his sake. We may easily imagine how much startled and surprised his disciples were at such discourses as these," &c. *Bp. Stillingfleet's* Sermon on Matt. xvi. 26.

ment to come."[9] The same holy boldness distinguished his ministry wherever he was called to exercise it. He reminds the elders of Ephesus that he had "kept back nothing that was profitable unto them," and had "not shunned to declare all the counsel of God."[1] He tells the Corinthians that he was "not as many, which corrupt the word of God."[2] He puts the Galatians in remembrance that "if he yet pleased men, he should not be the minister of Christ;" and asks whether he was "become their enemy, because he told them the truth."[3] His bonds at Philippi for the sake of the gospel, did not seal his lips in the same cause at Thessalonica—"Even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts."[4] The doctrine of the cross was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" nevertheless he did not scruple to be a minister

[9] Acts xxiv. 24—27.

[1] Acts xx. 20. 27.
[2] 2 Cor. ii. 17.
[3] Gal. i. 10; iv. 16.
[4] 1 Thess. ii. 2—6.

and a witness in all the synagogues, and to preach boldly to "both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."[5]

The other apostles gave a similar proof of fidelity to their commission at a very early period of their ministry. They were commanded straitly not to teach in the name of Jesus; and when called in question for having filled Jerusalem with their doctrine in defiance of this interdict, they alleged the paramount obligations of their ministry in that memorable reply—"We ought to obey God rather than men."[6] God gave them "not the spirit of fear, but of power."[7]

This declaration of the whole counsel of God will often be maintained at the expense of a severe struggle with self-indulgent and natural feelings.[8] It may compromise the ease of the pastor. It may check his general acceptance, and ruffle the tenor of his ministry. It will perhaps risk his popularity in those very quarters, where he is conscious that the pastoral tie is already weakest. It will possibly shake the love of those whose affections are drawn out to him

[5] 1 Cor. i. 24.

[6] Acts v. 28, 29. [7] 2 Tim. i. 7.

[8] "Such is the extreme selfishness natural to my heart, that it pains me, beyond expression, to reprove faithfully any particular friend." *Correspondence of Rev. Henry Venn*, p. 155.

as a friend, but not as a christian pastor, who watches over their souls as one who must give account. Men draw back from a conflict of this kind, or they endeavour to soften it down into something less painful. "They touch with such tenderness! and, if the patient shrinks, they will touch no more! The times are too flagrant for such a disposition. The gospel is sometimes preached in this way, till all the people agree with the preacher. He gives no offence, and he does no good."[9] This is a temptation which will press more heavily on some tempers than on others. Some will be deeply affected by it, while others of less constitutional delicacy will be exempted from much of its painfulness. Some, who by the grace of God have learned to overcome "the fear of man," will find it still more difficult to renounce the desire of being "men-pleasers."[1] This has been called the snare of "keeping on good terms with those who respect us."[2] Scott has affectingly described this trial. "Here I find my own deficiency, as much or more than in any other respect; and often I feel an inward timidity, when about to preach an unpopular doctrine, or expose a foible which some one of my congregation, whom I otherwise love and esteem, is remarkable for: and in every in-

9 *Cecil's Remains*, p. 241. 1 Prov. xxix. 25. Eph. vi. 6.
2 *Remains*, p. 228.

stance I feel the greatest reluctancy to resign the good opinion, or act contrary to the judgment of those for whom I have an esteem. It is true I am peculiarly bound to strive against this, by reason of my ministerial office. I am to speak boldly, not as a man-pleaser, but as the servant of God; and therefore I endeavour to master all these fears, and to act implicitly as my conscience suggests, without respect of persons.[3] Conformity to others in things unchristian, the fear of man, a servile spirit of time-serving, &c. are the faults of ministers, and effectually hinder even those who desire it, from performing the most important parts of their ministry, both in public preaching, and by private application."[4]

[3] "You will remember me in your prayers, that I may be bold on the second of July, when I am to preach the visitation sermon, that I may preach with christian love to my brethren, and all meekness. I find too much of selfishness, and of a coward's heart, lest I should be despised, and openly admonished. But I trust, when the hour of action is come, I shall find myself supported."—*Correspondence of Rev. Henry Venn*, p. 78.

[4] *Life*, p. 118. "He then that, for any respect whatsoever, is meal-mouthed in these things, wherein he is bound both in conscience, and by virtue of his own voluntary act to speak freely, neither is constant to his own hand and tongue, nor is 'faithful in God's house, as was Moses,' in discharging a good conscience and revealing unto his people the whole counsel of God." *Bp. Sanderson's* Sermon ad clerum on Rom. xiv. 3. "Remember Dr. Dodd! I myself heard him tell his own

Nor is this all. Circumspection, and a frequent review of the prominent topics of a ministry, are as essential to preserve its faithfulness, as boldness and fortitude. Omission of subjects which ought to be brought forward in the course of pastoral instruction, is of not less frequent occurrence than the preaching of "another gospel."[5] "Ministers may be supposed much more ready to fall short in this respect than in any other. It is probable that many more are chargeable with concealing truth, than affirming falsehood; with neglecting duty, than committing crimes; with not building the house, than wilfully pulling it down. Agreeably to this, we find the charge of the prophet against unfaithful shepherds is chiefly or only for neglect of duty."[6] Neither must we leave out some topics, because others insist on nothing else. Still less must we shrink from declaring the truth, because others are perverting it. The biographer of Mr. Cado-

flock, whom he was lecturing in his house, that he was obliged to give up that method of helping their souls, because it exposed him to so much reproach. He gave it up, and fell from one compliance to another, with his corrupt nature;—and under what reproach did he die! Oh, be afraid of nothing more than the detestable cowardice of a selfish and unbelieving heart!"—*Correspondence of Rev. Henry Venn*, p. 248.

[5] Gal. i. 9.

[6] Ezek. xxxiv. 2—4. *Dr. Witherspoon's* Sermon on Acts xx. 26, 27.

gan remarks his wisdom in not endeavouring to counteract erroneous doctrines by a method of dwelling exclusively on the opposite truth. "Whatever separate part of God's counsel an erroneous teacher was exclusively adopting, Mr. Cadogan wisely determined to preach the whole counsel of God. He would not quit the foundation because another was building wood, nay, stubble upon it. He was too well instructed blindly to advance one error as the only specific to cure another. Heresy is not to be cured by heresy, but by truth."[7]

3. Another difficult duty connected with faithfulness is the avoidance of a time-serving spirit for the sake of obtaining the praise of men. What the king of Israel said of Micaiah was an affecting instance of the consequences to which ministers are often exposed by faithfulness, as well as a noble testimony to the integrity of the prophet—"I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."[8]

The experience of a parish will suggest many occasions, when the minister finds that the enmity which pursued the master, follows the servant.[9] Seasons of confirmation are one of these sifting times. Offence is often taken, and many go back, if the system of preparation exceeds the accustomed standard, and the spirit of devo-

[7] *Life*, p. 48. [8] 1 Kings xxii. 8.
[9] John xv. 18, 19.

tion, in which this sacred ordinance should be approached, is pressed upon the catechumens with a seriousness too searching to be tolerated by the thoughtless and the worldly. Another common case occurs in the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. It may happen that there are those among the communicants, who need to be warned of the profanation of their attendance. The pastor must venture the painful consequences of telling them the truth; he must "set his face like a flint, and know that he shall not be ashamed, for he is near that justifieth him;" he must "fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings."[1] His justification is the command of his Lord—"He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully."[2]

4. Our Saviour did not consider conformity to the observances of the temple worship inconsistent with faithfulness. Notwithstanding the corruptions which disfigured the Jewish church, he was not afraid of appearing to sanction abuses, or give countenance to prevailing errors, by going up to the feasts, attending in the synagogues, and deferring to all the legal ordinances

[1] Isa. l. 7; li. 7. "The folly of shrinking from that hardship or suffering, which the frown or scorn of men can inflict on us, for faithfulness, appeared extreme, when I felt how easily God could inflict far sharper sufferings, if he saw good."—*Scott's Life*, p. 351.

[2] Jer. xxiii. 28.

with scrupulous respect. He exposed the traditions and perversions which abounded, and testified against the hypocrisy of the scribes and doctors of the law, but he did not withdraw himself or his disciples from communion in the worship over which they presided. Much more, then, may christians belong to a church, which is not antiscriptural in doctrine and discipline, though some of its ceremonies be derived from human authority, and not expressly enjoined by divine inspiration. They may worship with a religious society, which is based upon the principles of the gospel, though some of its members be corrupt, without being liable to the charge of countenancing their corruptions, or approving their errors. Faithfulness consists in refraining from participation in their vicious belief or practice; not in separation from their communion.

5. All pastoral experience tends to prove the utter inefficiency of a ministry, which is not faithful in exhibiting the vital truths of the gospel. How indeed could it be otherwise? There can be no efficacy in what has been made palatable only by adulteration. God will not honour what is not his own. He will not set his seal to a message which gives no adequate representation of his revealed will, no convincing statement of man's necessities, or of divine love. It is on the word, which goes forth out of the pastor's mouth as out of the mouth of God himself, that the

promised blessing rests—"It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."[3]

The experiment has been often tried; and many a conscientious pen has been constrained to write the record of its utter failure. Witness the well-known declaration of Dr. Chalmers, in his address to the inhabitants of Kilmaney. Witness the inefficiency of Mr. Scott's pastoral labours, in the early part of his ministry, before his mind had been directed by his conversations with Mr. Newton to inquire into the nature of his own views. Soon after taking priest's orders he laments that, "after preaching two of the most forcible discourses in his power, he had been able to collect only twenty-six or twenty-seven communicants." And in another letter of rather earlier date he says– "Whether I shall be able to make any reformation among my parishioners, I much doubt; but I tell them their duty pretty freely."[4]

Nor is the result more encouraging, when we proceed from the cases of individual christians and single parishes, to similar attempts upon a larger scale in the conversion of nations. The scheme of the Platonic christians to raise the superstructure of the gospel on the foundations of philosophy and the barren ethics of paganism,

[3] Isa. lv. 11. [4] *Life*, p. 57.

was a fruitless effort to assimilate the doctrines of revelation to principles diametrically opposed to religious truth. Limborch's plan for converting the Jews, by keeping out of sight the peculiarities of christianity to which they would be most opposed—the artifice of the Jesuits in China to remove the offence of the cross, by declaring the crucifixion to be a falsehood—the conciliation of caste by the Roman catholic missionaries in India, whose policy it was to flatter the pride of the Hindoos, and fall in with their superstitious practices—were all unworthy expedients, placing more dependance on the contrivances of human wisdom, than on the willingness of God to vindicate the honour of his word. They met, accordingly, with their deserved reward. The Abbé Dubois himself bears his testimony to the worthlessness of converts produced by the accommodating system. He confesses that "during a period of twenty-nine years that he has familiarly conversed with them, and lived among them as their religious teacher and spiritual guide, he would hardly dare to affirm that he has any where met a sincere christian."[5]

Contrast with this the successful preaching of the cross among the Greenlanders. There too, for nearly eighteen years, an equivocal gospel had been preached, without producing any effect

[5] *Reply to the Letters of the Abbé Dubois, on the state of Christianity in India, by the Rev. James Hough*, p. 67.

upon the hearers. While the Moravian missionaries confined themselves to explaining "the nature and perfections of God, and his just claims upon his creatures, the poor heathen were bound up and frozen like their own icy mountains. But in reading to them the affecting scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, the heart began to melt in tenderness, contrition, faith and love. They begged to have the story repeated, and it was to them as 'life from the dead.'"[6]

[6] "Crantz's History of Greenland—a most interesting work. In North America the same effects were produced upon widely different subjects. The following was the touching account given of himself by the first convert:—'Brethren,' said he, 'I have been a heathen, and have grown old among the heathen, therefore I know how heathens think. Once a preacher came and explained to us that there was a God: we answered, Dost thou think us so ignorant as not to know that? Another preacher began to teach us—You must not steal, lie, nor get drunk, &c.: we answered, Thou fool, dost thou think that we don't know that? and thus we dismissed him. After a time, brother Christian Henry Rauch came into my hut, and sat down by me. He spoke to me nearly as follows: 'I come to you in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth. He sends to let you know that he will make you happy, and deliver you from the misery in which you lie at present. To this end he became a man, gave his life a ransom for man, and shed his blood for us.' I could not forget his words—even while I was asleep, I dreamt of that blood which Christ shed for us. I found this to be something different from what I had ever heard, and I interpreted Christian Henry's words to the other Indians. Thus, through the

The preacher, therefore, must not be wise at the expense of his faithfulness. Essential and fundamental truth must not be sacrificed to accommodate the taste or indulge the prejudices of our people. Cecil has expressed this very strikingly. "An ingenious man thinks he can so manage to preach Christ, that his hearers will say—'Here is nothing of methodism! this has nothing to do with that system!' I will venture to say, if this is the sentiment communicated by his ministry, that he has not delivered his message. The people do not know what he means, or he has kept back part of God's truth. He has fallen on a carnal contrivance to avoid a cross; and he does no good to souls."[7] We are not to do what Watts calls "temporizing, by preaching the gospel a little more conformably to natural religion, to bring it down as near as may be to the moralist's scheme." It is only when the true word of the Lord is prophesied upon the dry bones, that "a noise" and "a shaking" are heard among them.[8] "God, in his

grace of God, an awakening took place among us. I say, therefore, brethren—Preach Christ our Saviour, and his sufferings and death, if you would have your words to gain entrance among the heathen.'—Loskiel's Missions to the North American Indians." *Bridges's Christian Ministry,* part iv. chap. iv. See also *Life of Rev. Legh Richmond,* p. 213—217.

[7] *Remains,* p. 103.

[8] Ezek. xxxvii. 7.

providence, seems to make but little account of the measures and contrivances of men, in accomplishing his designs."[9] All our clearest arguments are of no avail, as Martyn found among his Indians,[1] unless they are founded upon the distinguishing doctrines of the cross, and honour the Saviour by a faithful exhibition of his grace and love. But when Christ is exalted, and the gospel preached in its integrity and simplicity, in the spirit of a sound mind, Satan falls "like lightning from heaven,"[2] and is dethroned effectually from his empire in man's heart.

[9] *Remains*, p. 210.

[1] *Rev. J. Sargent's Life of Martyn*, p. 149. [2] Luke x. 18.

CHAPTER XI.

The Self-denial of the Ministry of Christ.

No passion is more congenial to fallen man, and more characteristic of an unchristian heart, than selfishness. The savage in his state of nature is essentially selfish. The heathens in their highest stage of civilization were essentially selfish. It is a trite remark, that Athens and Rome never erected a house of refuge or of healing, an asylum for want or disease, even when the national power and wealth were at the zenith of their prosperity. The case is the same with the worldly man even in a christian country. Selfishness is bound up in his heart, and ceases to be a ruling passion only with life itself. A sense of the wants of others, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the sake of mitigating or removing them, are implanted principles, not innate feelings. Naturally "all seek

their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."[1] Where the spirit of the gospel does not prevail, each struggles on, intent upon serving his own purpose, securing his own interest, advancing his own projects, maintaining his own credit, indulging his own ease. A brother suffers at his threshold, and no hand is stretched out to minister to his necessities; a neighbour lies by the way-side, and no traveller through the same wilderness stops to pour wine and oil into his wounds; a fellow-sinner passes into eternity, and no man cares for his soul, or rescues him from perishing for lack of knowledge.

Self-denial, on the other hand, is inseparable from the christian character. It is part and parcel of its very frame-work. It is a necessary and prominent grace in the heart which has been renewed by the Spirit of God, who is love. Where Christ enters, love enters also. The experience of divine love engenders a reciprocal feeling, and draws out the affections of the heart, not only towards him who hath so loved us, but towards the companions of our earthly pilgrimage.[2] We see in them the objects of God's love, and are filled with a spirit of brotherhood as members of the same body, and with an union of interests, as partakers of the same grace. Without this view there cannot be true con-

[1] Phil. ii. 21. [2] 1 John iv. 11.

geniality with our blessed Lord—the same mind cannot be in us which was in Christ Jesus.

For, what was the whole history of our Lord's incarnation, from the manger to his grave with the wicked, but one great and continual act of self-denial? It was in self-denial that he voluntarily divested himself of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was,[3] laying aside "the form of God," and "equality with God," and "made himself of no reputation" (ἑαυτον ἐκενώσε, emptied himself) "and took upon him the form of a servant, and . . . humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."[4] In self-denial he first subordinated himself to the good pleasure of his heavenly Father; and then, in the fashion of a man, to the commands of his parents according to the flesh—"He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." "Oh, my Father . . . not as I will, but as thou wilt." "I seek not mine own will." "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."[5]

I. Our Lord's choice of sphere for much of his personal ministry is a remarkable illustration of the self-denying tenor of his whole life. If

[3] John xvii. 5. [4] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[5] Luke ii. 51. Matt. xxvi. 39. John v. 30; vi. 38.

for a moment acceptance seemed to wait upon his steps, and his path was brightened with a gleam of popular favour, the man of sorrows withdrew, as from an uncongenial scene ; and he who never shrunk from encountering the scorn and contempt of the people, avoided their applause. He knew that "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house,"[6] yet he went into Capernaum, "his own city,"[7] as one content to be humiliated, despising the shame, and seeking not his own honour. But there were times when even Capernaum herself forgot her pride, and notwithstanding the terrible denunciation uttered against that city on account of its general impenitence, there seem to have been occasions when our Lord was received in it with much acceptance. We are told that "his word was with power" there, and the most urgent solicitations were employed to obtain his longer continuance in the place—"The people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them." Compliance with their desire would have afforded a seasonable asylum of rest and comfort to one who had seldom where to lay his head, and whose enemies were not a few in every city. But not to this end was he sent. To walk with

[6] Matt. xiii. 57. [7] Matt. ix. 1.

friends and well-wishers was not his path of duty. His ministry was rather to be exercised among the rough places—"I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore was I sent."[8] He turned his steps away from Cana at the very period when the recent manifestation of his glory, by the miracle which he had wrought there, would have attracted favour to his preaching.[9] No sooner did there appear fruit of his ministry in Samaria, than "he departed thence, and went into Galilee."[1] There too we are told the people heard him gladly; but he forthwith withdrew himself into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and instead of coming into the synagogues or to the places of public resort, where the fame of his miracles might have conciliated him a welcome, "he entered into a house, and would have no man know it; but," adds the evangelist emphatically, "he could not be hid."[2] Doubtless that human nature, which was acquainted with the sensations of hunger and thirst and weariness, would have rejoiced in the favourable acclamations of an admiring auditory; but during the time of "the hiding of his power"[3] he was to be set up as a mark for the arrows of scorn, and not for the receiving of honour. He therefore left those who

[8] Luke iv. 31—43.
[1] John iv. 43.
[9] John ii. 11, 12.
[2] Mark vii. 24.
[3] Habak. iii. 4.

were obedient to the word, and went to preach to unwilling ears among a people who despised the preacher, and rejected the doctrine. Once indeed we read of a happy time when "in that hour Jesus rejoiced."[4] But the man of sorrows knew not many such hours. Nor was it for himself that he rejoiced, but for the success of the seventy in their ministerial commission, and the fall of Satan. He counted the salvation of sinners "the joy that was set before him," and in seeing "the travail of his soul" accomplished in man's redemption, he was "satisfied."[5]

II. The self-denial of Christ shone forth brightly in his unwearied devotedness to his ministerial work. He anticipated it with delight even from eternity—"I was daily . . . . rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." "I delight to do thy will, O my God."[6] This devotion was early shown in his tarrying behind at Jerusalem without the knowledge of his parents; and in that remarkable answer to his

[4] Luke x. 21.

[5] Heb. xii. 2. Isa. liii. 11. See two instances of his joy in the prosperity of his work,—his manifestation of delight on witnessing the faith of the centurion, and of the Syrophenician woman. Matt. viii. 10; xv. 28.

[6] Prov. viii. 30, 31. Ps. xl. 8.

mother—"Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?"[7] In the ordinary course of his ministry, in the synagogue or abroad, his labours were incessant; the day was employed in teaching, and the night in prayer—"In the daytime he was teaching in the temple, and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple for to hear him."[8] "He was always at work, always the teacher. He instructed men before, and during, and after his miracles. He undertook journies, and neglected ordinary accommo-

[7] Luke ii. 49.

[8] Luke xxi. 37. See also xix. 47—"He taught daily in the temple"—and xxii. 53. "The devotedness of our 'heavenly Father' to this great work, furnishes a striking illustration of the true spirit of the christian ministry—'doing with our might.' His whole soul was in it—intent upon one thing—subordinating relative obligations—personal claims of convenience—and even present necessity, to the main business. No time was wasted upon trifles. Even the common intercourse and courtesies of life were made the vehicles of the most important instruction. Public occasions were improved for the same blessed purpose. The thought of relinquishing his work was intolerable. Through reproach and tribulation of the most appalling kind he persevered to the end. The labours of single days were such as are unprecedented in ministerial annals, and exhibited the course of a lengthened ministry compressed within the contracted space of three years."—*Bridges's Christian Ministry*, part iii. ch. 1.

dations, and even food, in order to teach particular sinners."[9] His very rest was devoted to the relief of spiritual wants, and his repose made subservient to the salvation of souls. As he sat "wearied with his journey" on the well, he ministered to the necessities of one yet more tired in the ways of sin, and laboured with intense eagerness to communicate instruction to the poor woman who talked with him. He did not repeat his request for water after he had engaged her heart in listening attention to his word.[1]

This is a height of excellence to which man cannot soar; but it may be contemplated as a standard of imitation, and sought after with prayer to him who will proportion his strength to the weakness of his creatures. The mortal body must have its sustenance, and the mind its cessation from labour, or neither can long preserve a healthy tone; but our Lord's example will teach his ministers not to be deterred on slight grounds from following him, like the great apostle, "in weariness and painfulness . . . . in hunger and thirst, in fastings often,"[2] when the salvation of a soul, as occasionally happens, may seem to de-

[9] *Bp. Daniel Wilson's Evidences of Christianity.* Lecture xvii.

[1] John iv 6—14. Compare also 31—34.

[2] 2 Cor. xi. 27.

pend, humanly speaking, upon some extraordinary effort of their ministry.

In truth, throughout the whole of the things recorded by the evangelists respecting Jesus, whether we find him sitting down in the midst of multitudes assembled to hear his doctrine, or retiring apart with his disciples to explain what he had spoken to others in parables—whether on occasions of social intercourse, or on more set and formal opportunities of teaching—whether among friends or enemies, at the last supper, or before Pilate; whether alone or in company, in prayer to his heavenly Father, or questioning the doctors in the temple—forgetfulness of self is the prominent feature—the main purpose of his mission is ever before his eyes—a new illustration is offered in each situation of the truth of that saying—"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."[3] Not the strictness of the Levitical sabbath,[4] not the unseasonableness of the time or place,[5] not the danger from known enemies surrounding and observing him,[6] not the toil of continuous teaching, without intermission or refreshment,[7]

[3] John iv. 34.

[4] John ix. 4.

[5] Matt. xv. 29—32.

[6] John vii. 14—30.

[7] Mark vi. 31—34. "When the multitude followed our Lord on a particular occasion, although he wished for retirement, and had gone purposely to seek it, yet he gave

not the exhaustion of bodily fatigue,[8] not the calls of natural affection,[9] could turn him aside from his self-denying course, or shake his settled purpose of devoting all his energies to the prosecution of his task. "His unwearied diligence and zeal in accomplishing the grand object of his mission, were very remarkable. His ministry, though contracted within narrow limits, was most laborious. For the last three years and a half, which is supposed to include the whole of his public life, he travelled much, and preached often, and that too with great fatigue both of body and mind. If we accompany him from place to place, we shall observe him constantly intent upon his work, foregoing his own ease and temporal comfort, and cheerfully meeting extreme sufferings, that he might be useful. In one word, "he went about doing good."[1] It was a part of his cross that he should seek on every side for the lost sheep; and it was little to

up his design and attended to them. Mark the condescension and tenderness of such conduct, in opposition to a sour, monastic, morose temper. We are too fond of our own will. We want to be doing what we fancy to be mighty things; but the great point is to do small things when called to them, in a right spirit."—*Cecil's Miscellaneous Remarks*, appended to *Remains*.

[8] John iv. 6, compared with 31, 32.

[9] Matt. xii. 46—50. Luke ii. 49.

[1] *Robinson's Scripture Characters*, vol. ii. sect. xxxiii.

him that he should visit the two hundred cities of the single province of Galilee in such a service.[2] There was too the fulfilment of prophecy in all this patient endurance of trial and discouragement—"He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law."[3]

III. Observe, again, the self-denial of Jesus in the near prospect of death. The certain anticipation of suffering is more paralyzing to flesh and blood, than the suffering itself. It had the effect of stimulating our Lord to increased activity. That his days were numbered, was a signal for redoubled diligence. His opportunity was about to pass away; it behoved him therefore to work the work of him that sent him, before the day was gone; the night was at hand, and he must make the most of the light while it lasted.[4] Witness his long and important discourse with the disciples, just before the hour for the consummation of his ministry—as if he would leave an example to pastors approaching the term of their labours, to put their people in remembrance the more earnestly.[5]

[2] Matt. iv. 23. [3] Isa. xlii. 4. Compare xlix. 4, 5.

[4] John ix. 4.

[5] John xiii—xvii. Compare the language of St. Peter, when his Lord had showed him that he must shortly put off

At no time indeed did Christ seem more unable to bear the thought of relaxing or relinquishing his work, than at the very end of it. That he might complete it, he pressed on with eagerness even to suffering—"I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."[6] All was voluntary, from the going up to Jerusalem even to the final surrender; and the cheerfulness of the victim, now ready to be sacrificed, was strikingly contrasted with the amazement and fear of his disciples—"Jesus went before them, ... and as they followed, they were afraid."[7] He delighted in the arrival of the passover which was to be the signal for his sufferings—"With desire I have desired to eat it with you."[8] And when he entered upon his passion, self-denial was still predominant, even in that hour of the secret travail of his soul. "'He began to be sorrowful'—which words seem to denote a spontaneous action. Christ took on himself this sorrow, and willingly and deliberately gave himself up to the divine

this his tabernacle, 2 Pet. i. 13—15. See also the closing scenes of the life of Moses, Deut. xxxiii; of Joshua, Josh. xxiii. xxiv.; and of David, 1 Kings ii. 1—10. 1 Chron. xxviii. xxix.

[6] Luke xii. 50.

[7] Mark x. 32.

[8] Luke xxii. 15.

justice."[9] "Abba, Father . . . . not what I will, but what thou wilt."[1]

The self-denial of Christ is perpetually held out for the imitation of his followers. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."[2] It was the test with which he sifted the principles of the young man—"Sell whatsoever thou hast . . . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me."[3] Peter and Andrew were called to the practical exercise of the same grace, when they were invited to forsake their nets, and give up the pursuit of all secular occupations, that they might become laborious, disinterested, and devoted "fishers of men."[4] James and John were put to a similar trial, when they were bidden to postpone their natural affection, and leaving "their father Zebedee" with the hired servants, to enter upon a nobler employment, and follow Christ.[5] St. Paul gave many a proof of his proficiency in this lesson. He refrained from his right of maintenance, that he might not be a charge to any man.[6] He submitted to the Mo-

9 *Rambach's Meditations on the Sufferings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, p. 22.

1 Mark xiv. 36.

2 Matt. xvi. 24.

3 Mark x. 21.

4 Mark i. 16—18.

5 Mark i. 20. Compare Luke xiv. 25—27.

6 Acts xx. 33—35.

saic institutions, and laid himself under voluntary restrictions with respect to things lawful, that he might not offend the scruples of the feeblest converts.[7] During his imprisonment at Rome, he deprived himself of the solace and co-operation of Epaphroditus, who ministered to his wants, and sent his "brother and companion in labour" back to the believers at Philippi, that they might rejoice in seeing him again, and profit under the renewal of his ministry.[8] And hence he could require with boldness reciprocal sacrifices from the christian churches, if expedient for the general good,—as when he called upon the Corinthians to give up their beloved teacher, that he might preach the gospel in the regions beyond them.[9] Hence too he could urge with the more effect on both Jew and gentile that self-denying rule, of which his own life was the consistent example. And so he writes to the Romans—"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself." And to the Thessalonians—"Yourselves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat

[7] 1 Cor. viii. 13; ix. 19—22. [8] Phil. ii. 25—28.
[9] 2 Cor. x. 15, 16.

any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you; not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us." And to the Hebrews—"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God."[1]

We must then "look to Jesus," and to the apostolical pattern, with a steady eye, in the formation of this part of the ministerial character. Severe and painful will be the conflict between nature and grace; and the victory cannot be gained except upon our knees. Resistance unto blood will often become necessary.[2] Old Adam, unless he be watched with vigilance, and kept under by the exercise of a lively and constant faith, will be found too hard for young Melancthon.

For instance;

1. There is no purer source of joy to a minister than the affection of his parishioners. To be beloved of them for his work's sake, and to witness the acceptance with which his labours in

[1] Rom. xv. 1—3. 2 Thess. iii. 7—9. Heb. xii. 1, 2. Compare 1 John iii. 16.

[2] Heb. xii. 4.

their behalf are received, are the most precious earthly rewards he can enjoy. Yet he will sometimes find himself called upon to forego these delights. It may become his duty to deny himself the inexpressible comfort of living in the midst of an attached people. He must learn that it is not where his inclination would suggest, but where his services are most needed, that, if the providence of God opens the way for his steps, he is directed to pitch his tent.

This was eminently the spirit in which Bishop Heber consecrated himself to what proved, prematurely, if calculated according to the erring judgments of men, his missionary martyrdom.[3] "Where my present thoughts will lead me, I know not," said another of kindred sentiments,

[3] The eloquent biographer of the first Indian bishop, pays a just tribute to his memory on the same ground. "Who can fitly estimate that triumph of self-denial which he was enabled to achieve, when he obeyed the voice which summoned him to the diocese of India? When he was invited to this vast and untried sphere of duty, be it always remembered, he was in the plenitude of comfort, happiness, and reputation at home, &c. &c. If, therefore, mere secular interests or motives could have made themselves heard, when he was called to the task of founding the Anglo-Indian church, that church would never have had him for her spiritual father; and the banks of the Ganges might never have been adorned and hallowed by a monument so noble, as that which will now transmit his name to the remotest ages."—*Le Bas's Life of Bp. Middleton*, vol. ii. p. 332.

"but I look round upon the lovely spot (——a more beautiful spot I never saw; it is the garden of Cambridgeshire,) with all the indifference of a man who would, with the greatest cheerfulness, part with all, if a situation of greater usefulness, however laborious, should offer itself. Here I am—'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'"[4] His resolutions were soon put to the test. It seemed probable that he would be called from his "pleasant place," endeared to him by a simple-minded and affectionate flock, to exercise his ministry in the laborious sphere of South Shields. "Little less than the spirit of a missionary," says his biographer, "was requisite to make him renounce the retirement, the simplicity, and all the nameless delights and associations of that post, for a place characterized by noise and dirt, and by the wretchedness and ignorance of a dense population. 'I have looked again over the barren hills, and smoke, and dirt, and feel that the consideration of fifteen thousand souls outweighs every thing.' These were the expressions of his self-devotion: knowing how arduous it was to become the minister in a town so populous and opulent, where the minds of men were either immersed in business, or degraded to the lowest state of vulgarity or profaneness, he argued thus with

[4] *Memoir of Rev. T. Thomason*, p. 117.

himself,—'there are many who are reconciled to live here all their days in the pursuit of wealth, and shall not the love of Christ and the honour of souls engage me in the same self-denial? When a door is opened for the extension of his kingdom, shall a minister of Christ say, I will not enter it, because the country is dreary, and the place is full of filth and wretchedness? God forbid! Here I am; if it please God to fix me here, I shall be contented to live and die among them. These things move me not; the only thing that moves me, is the fear lest I should not bring a right spirit to the good work.'" [5]

Such too was the spirit which animated Felix Neff, when he chose the most desolate and forbidden defile of the Alps for his pastoral sphere. "The rock on which Dormilleuse stands is almost inaccessible, even in the finest months of the year . . . Perhaps, of all the habitable spots in Europe, this wretched village is the most repulsive. Nature is stern and terrible without offering any boon but that of personal security from the fury of the oppressor, to invite man to make his resting-place here. When the sun shines brightest, the side of the mountain opposite to Dormilleuse, and on the same level, is covered with snow, and the traveller, in search of new scenes to gratify his taste for the sublime

[5] *Remains*, p. 125.

or beautiful, finds nothing to repay him for his pilgrimage, but the satisfaction of planting his foot on the soil, which has been hallowed as the asylum of christians, of whom the world was not worthy . . . . The eye wanders in vain for any one point of fascination . . . . Great must have been the love which filled the pastor's bosom, to make him prefer this worse than wilderness, this concentration of man's wretchedness, to all the other hamlets of his parish. He turned from the inviting Arvieux, and the affectionate hospitality of San Veran, and the magnificent grandeur of Vars, to make his chief residence in the bleak and gloomy Dormilleuse, because there his services appeared to be most required. Because there he had every thing to teach, even to the planting of a potato. But his whole life was a sacrifice ; he lived for nothing else than to be useful to his fellow-creatures, and to be a labourer in the service of his Redeemer."[6]

2. The pastor must often deny himself, by carrying his ministry among those who are least congenial to his views and feelings. It was a natural wish in the man out of whom Jesus had cast a legion of devils, to desire to be with his benefactor. But Christ suffered him not, and sent him to be profitable to his countrymen.[7]

6 *Memoir of Felix Neff, by Rev. W. S. Gilly*, p. 130—132.

7 Luke viii. 37, 38.

So it must be with the minister. He must often renounce the benefits and comforts of spiritual communion. His taste would lead him to be much with those of his people who are like-minded with himself; to whom he looks as the fruits given by the Spirit to his labours, and his future crowns of rejoicing. His easiest as well as his most pleasant task would be with them; but his concern for the welfare of those, whose souls have not yet been awakened to a concern for themselves, will lead him to go after them, though they flee him. They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick. He must not select souls out of the whole number committed to his charge; he must be the pastor of them all, of the many erring and straying, as well as of the folded few; a warning voice to those who oppose themselves, as well as the instructor of the meek and tractable; the reclaimer of the disobedient, as well as the friend of those who take sweet counsel, and sit in the house of God in company with him. Greater attention must even be paid to the stray sheep, than to the ninety and nine which are safe in the fold. The very hireling will not refuse to stay by the flock which has not wandered; but it is only the good shepherd who will be so diligent as to go after "that which is lost until he find it."[8]

[8] Luke xv. 4.

The pastor's time, therefore, must not be so much occupied about the most hopeful of his people, as their oneness of sentiment might lead him to desire. That occasional intercourse with them which duty does not forbid, is like a sweet fragrance, refreshing to his soul, and invigorating to his spirits. But it is as the rainbow light in the midst of a sky of clouds and darkness,—a bright and cheering ray, which shoots across the lowering heavens, and lightens up the gloom. It is a genial atmosphere in which he pauses, as it were, for a moment, not the element in which he lives habitually. He is not to be, like Baxter at Kidderminster, the teacher of a gathered church, the minister of a segment of his parish.[9] His care must be directed, not only to those who hear gladly, but to the gainsaying and rebellious, that God may have the greater glory in the cure of those whose case is most desperate. He, who endured the fellowship of publicans and sinners, has said—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."[1] His ministers must look on every one of their people as a charge committed to them by God, and must spare no pains

9 See *Orme's Life of Baxter,* prefixed to the London edition of his works, 1830, p. 126; and the propriety of his pastoral discipline questioned, in *Rev. T. V. Short's Sketch of the History of the Church of England,* sect. 611—613.

1 John vi. 37.

in seeking them out, and plucking them, if it is the divine will, at whatever cost of personal feeling, as brands out of the burning. They will imitate their master most closely, when engaged in calling sinners to partake of the rich grace of the gospel. They will remember the word of the Lord which went out against the unfaithful shepherds of old, and the testimony borne against them by the chief shepherd himself—"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; . . . and they were scattered, because there is no shepherd; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them."[2]

3. Personal self-denial, in respect of matters in themselves indifferent, is a part of the ministerial cross. All things that are lawful are not expedient. "A christian," says Mr. Cecil, "is called to refrain from some things, which though actually right, yet will not bear a good appearance to all men. I once judged it my duty to

[2] Ezek. xxxiv. 4—6.

refuse a considerable sum of money, which I might lawfully and fairly have received, because I considered that my account of the matter could not be stated to some, to whom a different representation would be made."[3] At the commencement of Henry Martyn's ministry at Dinapore, the Europeans addressed a letter to him, requesting him to give up extempore preaching. "He resolved upon compliance, for the sake of conciliation—saying, that he would give them a folio sermon-book, if they would receive the word of God on that account."[4] His biographer quotes from his journal another instance of the watchfulness with which this devoted servant of God desired to bring into subjection every habit which tended to foster a natural love of ease, or to detract from his ministerial usefulness. "A despicable indulgence in lying in bed gave me such a view of the softness of my character, that I resolved on my knees to live a life of more self-denial; the tone and vigour of my mind rose rapidly; all those duties, from which I usually shrink, seemed recreations. I collected all the passages from the four gospels that

[3] *Rev. J. Pratt's Character of Rev. R. Cecil*, prefixed to the Remains, p. 14. See an instance of similar disinterestedness, on the part of the late Rev. Henry Venn, *Correspondence*, p. 112.

[4] *Life*, p. 225.

had any reference to this subject;—it is one on which I need to preach to myself, and mean to preach to others."[5]

It requires, indeed, but brief experience of parochial claims, to discover that, whatever be the minister's own estimate, his people account his hours and his ease as their own. They rarely study his convenience, and are not forward to economize his strength or labour. They expect the surrender of his time, and are irritated if it is withholden from them. Want of punctuality and an appearance of self-indulgence have not unfrequently detached as many hearers from the church, as her doctrine or discipline. Men are apt to become quickly intolerant, when they

[5] *Life*, p. 67. "Any amusement that may give offence to parishioners must be relinquished; and those which are perfectly unexceptionable in their character, must be always considered and enjoyed as occasional recreations, in order to recruit and sharpen his powers for his principal employment, not as themselves necessary, and therefore not such as ought to engross any considerable portion of his time. In a word, let him never forget in this matter the sovereign rule of St. Paul, that even christian liberty must be exercised with a constant regard to christian charity; that he must not do that which is lawful in itself, if the doing of it *by him* will cause offence in his weaker brethren; and that he who neglects the dictates of christian prudence, neglects that which the doctrines and the example of the apostles equally inculcate upon the unselfish and believing follower of Christ."—*Coleridge's Advice to the Young Parish Priest*—a manual of great interest and practical usefulness.

think they have to complain of a personal grievance. That their demands are often unreasonable, will be no acquittal to the conscience of him, whose first object is to win souls. The comfort of the individual must not be placed in competition with the good of his people. Private inclination, and legitimate engagements, and sometimes even needful repose, must be made to yield to the imperious calls of pastoral duty.[6] Matthew Henry says in reference to an application to preach which involved a long journey—"I promised to go. It is against the grain; but I would not do any thing that looks like breaking my word, taking state, or loving my ease." At another time he writes—"Private comfort must always give way to public service, in which I am willing to spend and be spent. The Lord assist me, and accept of me."[7]

4. There are some to whom the most difficult trial of the ministerial life will be intellectual self-denial. Education has given them a literary taste; cultivation of the mind has enlarged its range of pursuit; and the inexhaustible stores of learning which the researches of ancient and modern wisdom have provided, invite the man of contemplation or of imagination to a perpetual

[6] Mark iii. 20, 21; 31—35. Luke vi. 12—19. See *Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Winchester*, 1833, p. 37.

[7] *Life*, p. 153.

feast. But the vow of his priesthood forbids. He has promised, the Lord being his helper, to be diligent in reading the holy scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh. He has received a solemn admonition to apply himself wholly to this one thing, and draw all his cares and studies this way.[8] Like John the Baptist, when "the word of God came to him in the wilderness,"[9] he must abandon his solitary vigils, and the pleasures of contemplation. "No good could be done to others in solitude, no converts could be made in the desert; and he must therefore quit even the most refined and exalted of intellectual enjoyments, as every minister of Christ should be ready to do, when charity dictates an attendance on the necessities of his fellow-creatures."[1]

Doddridge gives a characteristic caution in reference to this temptation. "I fear many things

[8] *Office of ordination of priests.* [9] Luke iii. 2.

[1] *Bishop Horne on the Life and Death of St. John the Baptist*, sect. v. "The man who is deeply imbued with the love either of ecclesiastical history, or of the higher and metaphysic divinity, will not find it easy to check his pursuit of it, and will be inclined to appeal to the character of his reading in justification of himself: yet, if he has a parish under his care, he must forego every thing for its sake."—*Coleridge's Advice to the Young Parish Priest.*

which employ a very large portion of our retired time, are studied rather as polite amusements to our own minds, than as things which seem to have any apparent subserviency to the glory of God, and the edification of our flock . . . . as for the waters that are drawn from these springs, how sweetly soever they may taste to a curious mind that thirsts for them, or to an ambitious mind which thirsts for the applause they sometimes procure, I fear there is often reason to pour them out before the Lord with rivers of penitential tears, as the blood of souls which have been forgotten, while these trifles have been remembered and pursued." "The vows of God," said another aged minister, then ready to depart, "are upon us; at least I feel this to be my case; for almost forty years since, I solemnly vowed before God not to engage in any literary pursuit or publication, however creditable or lucrative it might be, which had not the religious instruction of mankind for its immediate object. All our reading ought to be subservient to this. We may read any books, ancient or modern, sacred or profane, infidel, heretical, or what not; but always as ministers: to work such things as may the better enable us to defend and plead for the truth as it is in Jesus; never merely for amusement, or curiosity, or love of learning, simply for its own sake, or for the credit or advantages

derived from it."[2] "I did this," he says elsewhere, "for a considerable time; but I think I should have been qualified for various services for which I am now incompetent, had I set apart a portion of my time, not too large, for acquiring general knowledge."[3] And again—"In some respects, perhaps, my notions on these subjects were too contracted."[4] His son adds, that "though for several years he never opened a book which treated of any thing besides religion, this by no means continued to be the case when his mind was made up, and well stored with information upon theological questions. On the contrary, his reading then became as various as he had the opportunity of making it. No book which furnished knowledge that might be turned to account, was uninteresting to him. It was his sentiment that every student should be as excursive in his researches as his particular calling would allow him to be; but that every one should have, so to speak, a hive to which to bring home his collected stores; should make all his acquisitions bear upon some useful object."[5] I add

[2] *Letters and Papers of the late Rev. T. Scott*, p. 309.

[3] *Letters and Papers*, p. 218. [4] *Life*, p. 100.

[5] *Life*, p. 102. "I wish every clergyman to be a well-informed man, having a mind stored with useful literature, every particle of which should be consecrated to the study of the Bible, and the souls of men."—*Life of Legh Richmond*, p. 581.

Baxter's striking testimony to the value of learning, properly subordinated to its true end. "I abhor the folly of those unlearned persons, who revile or despise learning, because they know not what it is; and I take not any piece of true learning to be useless; and yet my soul approveth of the resolution of holy Paul, who determined to know nothing among his hearers (that is, comparatively to value and make ostentation of no other wisdom) but the knowledge of a crucified Christ; to know God in Christ is life eternal."[6]

5. The minister's self-denial will sometimes consist in sparing himself. A voice seems to speak intelligibly to him—"Take heed, and be quiet."[7] He must do less, that he may do more. But there is "pain and grief,"[8] as the psalmist felt of old, in thus refraining from good words. The silent Sunday will pass heavily with one who would fain be telling of the mercies of his God in the great congregation. But he must lay his hand upon his mouth,[9] and say—It is the Lord. "I am ready to conclude," writes one

6 Extract from Narrative of the most remarkable passages of his Life and Times.—*Wordsworth's Eccles. Biog.* vol. v. p. 566.

7 Isa. vii. 4.

8 Ps. xxxix. 2, Prayer-book version.

9 Job xl. 4.

who was called to submit to this painful experience, "I shall not long be able to speak even in this whispering church . . . . The will of the Lord, I hope to say cheerfully, be done! Yet of all trials I have ever known, this of having the treasure which is ordained to enrich to all eternity the souls of men, and not strength of voice to declare and communicate it to our dear fellow-creatures, is one of the most severe. May you understand this, and be wise in time! I am persuaded we do wrong to outdo our strength."[1] And again—"I am a melancholy instance of overdoing in point of speaking. I would not therefore have you exceed your strength." "We attribute this illness to my frequent exertions in London. I am yet to learn a little of Pythagoras's discipline. Silent I cannot be!—but, I observe, Pythagoras had not redemption to talk of."[2]

[1] *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 176. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 185, 487.

CHAPTER XII.

The Condescension of the Ministry of Christ.

The lowliness of Christ's condescension was a matter of special prediction—"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . . . lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."[1] He proposed himself as an exemplar of this grace—"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."[2] And St. Paul grounds his appeal to the Corinthians on this particular feature in the Lord's character—"I, Paul, myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."[3]

How amply the promise of the prophet was redeemed, is testified in every page of the New Testament. What a mystery of condescension lies hid in the fact contained in that single clause!—"Who, being in the form of God . . . .

[1] Zech. ix. 9. [2] Matt. xi. 29.

[3] 2 Cor. x. 1.

was made in the likeness of man."[4] How important the lesson which the apostle derives from such exemplary love and grace!—"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves . . . . let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."[5] How affecting the appeal grounded upon it against the pride and haughtiness of the human heart, puffed up with vain imaginations, and hastily exalting itself against the knowledge of God!—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich."[6]

In clothing himself with mortality Christ was in this world, not as one of the rich, or mighty, or noble, but "as one that serveth." "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."[7] All was accordant with this depth of self-abasement. The manger,—the flight into Egypt,—the subjection to parents,—the carpenter's trade,—the spectacle of the greater blessed by the less in the baptismal waters of Jordan,—the discipline in the desert of temptation,—the hunger and thirst and weariness and perpetual journeyings,—the price set upon his head, and the numbering with the transgressors—all the incidents of his life, from his stable at Bethlehem to his cross

[4] Phil. ii. 6, 7. [5] Phil. ii. 3, 5.
[6] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [7] Luke xxii. 27. Matt. xx. 28.

at Jerusalem, were illustrations of a lowliness of condescension into which the angels look with wonder; and which man, for the redemption of whose soul he stooped so low, may well contemplate with adoring love.

But it was not more in the poverty of his parentage, than in his choice of a contemned and ignoble country, that the condescension of Christ was signally manifested. St. Paul could say that he was a Roman, a citizen of no mean city, and claim the privileges of his free birth.[8] Christ did not disdain the character of a man of Galilee, bordering on the heathen, "Galilee of the gentiles," the district of least repute, and despised on account of its remoteness from the centre of Jewish polity and worship.[9] Thence he came to John for baptism.[1] There he began his ministry.[2] Thither he returned after his resurrection.[3] He took up his abode in Nazareth, despicable even to a proverb, or in the little fishing town of Capernaum, fishermen themselves being his chief companions. And even of these very companions, low as they were, he stooped to become the servant in that memorable instance of humility recorded in John xiii. 4, 5—an inci-

8 Acts xxi. 39; xxii. 25—28.

9 John vii. 41, 52.

1 Matt. iii. 13.

2 Luke iv. 14. Acts x. 37.

3 Matt. xxvi. 32; xxviii. 7, 10, 16.

dent which may serve as a lesson to pastors not to think the meanest of their people unworthy of their personal offices and closest attention. "He that is greatest, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."[4] Quesnel remarks that this instance of our Lord's condescension, striking as it is, "is but a shadow of that more perfect and abasing humiliation, whereby the Son of God, as it were, stripped himself of all his majesty and glory, to clothe himself with the nature of servants, as with a napkin or towel, with which he wiped away our sins and earthly affections, after having washed us in the water of his tears and his blood."[5]

What was the character of his mission? Was he the preacher to the chiefs of the people? Were the great and influential of his nation among his followers? It was asked tauntingly —"Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?"[6] His ministry was principally exercised among men of lowest estate. It was specially for the despised and neglected of the world. He was sent to preach effectually[7]

[4] Luke xxii. 26. John xiii. 15.

[5] On John xiii. 4, 5.

[6] John vii. 48. See also Luke xix. 47, 48.

[7] εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, Luke iv. 18.

the gospel to the poor; to proclaim deliverance to the captives. We do not read of his disputing again with the doctors after his twelfth year; but wherever the people were, there his work was found. And hence that descriptive testimony of himself—"Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see . . . . . the poor have the gospel preached to them."[8] He thought it not much to hold intercourse, for the sake of usefulness, with characters universally shunned, insomuch that it was imputed to him as a crime that he ate with publicans and sinners.[9] He refused to be called "Rabbi," and "good," but was contented to make himself of no reputation, and acquiesced in the title of the friend of sinners.[1]

There was a remarkable absence of ostentation in his very mode of discharging the office of a teacher. He did not court the attendance of large multitudes of hearers. Many of his most important discourses were addressed to single individuals. His conversation with Nicodemus took place by night, and privately; not before all the members of the great council to which his visitor belonged.[2] The woman of Samaria also received her instruction singly.[3] We read

[8] Matt. xi. 4, 5.
[1] Matt. xi. 19.
[9] Matt. ix. 10—13.
[2] John iii.
[3] John iv.

of no other cure performed in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, than that of the Syrophenician woman's daughter only.[4]

The tenor of his discourses was conceived in the same spirit of graciousness and condescension. Simplicity and plainness were their characteristics. There was a careful adaptation of his language and thoughts to the capacities of his hearers. There was an inculcation of first principles—a teaching "Ephraim," as it were, "to go, taking them by their arms."[5] There was a patient bearing with misapprehensions, and a kind removal of them. Twice the woman of Samaria mistook his meaning, when he spoke to her of living water; but the insensibility of her soul, and its deadness to spiritual impressions, did not deter him from repeating his metaphor, and confirming his statement by a fuller explanation.[6] The disciples were "fools and slow of heart," and therefore, going back to the earliest pages of their sacred records, and "beginning at Moses and the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."[7] And, as if this were not enough, he is even represented as a suitor to the heart of man. It had been much had he only encouraged suppliants to solicit grace, and

[4] Matt. xv. 21.
[5] Hos. xi. 3.
[6] John iv. 11, 14.
[7] Luke xxiv. 25—27.

contented himself with declaring—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."[8] But Christ did more. He reversed the natural order of things, and strove against the opposition offered by the prejudices and unbelief of the human heart with an importunity which no refusal could weary, and with a love which no obstinacy of rebellion could quench. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."[9] So that in spite of the frivolous excuses, or open resistance of a reluctant generation, he continued pleading their own cause against themselves, and, like Jehovah of old, "stretched forth his hands all day long unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."[1]

1. The value of a single soul in the sight of the great Teacher, is a lesson worthy of the remembrance of his ministers. It is not the province of all to speak of the glad tidings of salvation to the great congregation; the path of duty will lead many, as it did John the Baptist, into the wilderness, where, though called, like him, to labour among few hearers, they may perform their commission as acceptably to God, and as

[8] Matt. vii. 7. [9] Rev. iii. 20. Compare Cantic. v. 2—6.

[1] Rev. x. 21, compared with Isa. lxv. 2.

usefully, as in the cities of Galilee. Are they tempted to be discouraged by the smallness of their charge? They have the comfort of their Master's example, as well as of their Master's promise—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[2] If Satan taunts them, like the brother of David, with the suggestion that their flock is but as a "few sheep in the wilderness," let them reflect that it is still that "beautiful flock" for which Christ shed his blood; and he will one day ask of their pastor respecting each of them, inconsiderable as their number may have been, "With whom hast thou left them?"[3] We are not our own, in respect of place, any more than as regards disposal of time, or choice of duty. "The placing ministers is one of the chief prerogatives of our Lord and Head. His thoughts and ways in this matter are totally different from ours. Hence we see several of his pastors and teachers in spheres very unfit for them, as it appears,—men of abilities, zeal, and application, preaching to a handful of peasants,—others, without talents, in places of great resort, among men of education. But every mouth must be stopped; and no inquiry is allowed, why he doeth so and so. Our business is indisputably

[2] Matt. xviii. 20.

[3] 1 Sam. xvii. 28. Jer. xiii. 20.

plain—'Work while it is day.' Be zealous and pure from the blood of all men, whether you speak to one hundred or some thousands. None more glorify God, than patient, satisfied pastors, who never admit the thought of choosing for themselves."[4]

Is then the pastor tempted, in his retired and thinly peopled parish, to spare his labour, and put forth less of his strength than he might be willing to expend in a sphere of greater excitement, and more obvious to the inspection of men? Let him ask himself whether the oversight even of a single soul be not more than he will desire to answer for at the day of account? Let him guard with jealousy against permitting the absence of an unholy and worldly stimulus to influence the character of his ministry. "In a small country parish, in which he is concealed from the observation of the world, he must especially beware of idleness and lukewarmness; of a slovenly preparation for the pulpit; a total neglect, or a hasty and superficial discharge of the other pastoral duties, as if the flock were less precious in

[4] *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 496. And again—"A company of about one hundred hearers have him for their teacher, whose good sense, and knowledge and grace, qualify him for the largest sphere. This is one of the secrets not to be explored by us; it is enough to know that the Head of the Church fixes his ministers as seemeth best to his infinite wisdom.'—P. 151.

God's sight, because of its smallness; or, perhaps, of its confined range in mental cultivation." [5]

2. Christ's condescension to the dull understandings of the people teaches the pastor not to think it grievous to repeat often the same things —or to clear away even the unreasonable doubts of one weak in faith—or to satisfy the unnecessary scruples of a conscience tender, but ill-informed—or to instruct in meekness those who oppose themselves; remembering that, notwithstanding his own defects, his want of faith, or of love, or of zeal, Christ still suffers him, condescends to work by his ministry, and glorifies himself in the weakness of his agent. It is said of Christ, on the people resorting to him, "as he was wont, he taught them again." [6] The minister has yet much instruction to deliver even to those who have been taught of God.

3. Conformity to our Lord's pattern will teach us not to speak things hard to be understood, but to sacrifice on the shrine of usefulness whatever interferes with the main object of our preaching. It is one of the boasts of our liturgy, that it is couched in a form of words understood by the people. It must be the care of the minister that the language of the pulpit

[5] *Coleridge's Advice to the Young Parish Priest*, p. 6.

[6] Mark x. 1.

accord in this respect, as well as in the yet more important particular of scriptural doctrine, with the language of the desk. He who speaks in an unknown tongue to his flock is not profitable for edification. "We study how to speak," said the judicious Philip Henry, "that you may understand us; and I never think that I can speak plain enough, when I am speaking about souls and their salvation."[7] St. Paul considered this accommodation a part of his duty as "debtor to the unwise."[8] And he takes the Corinthians to witness that he and his fellow-labourer Timothy had used among them "great plainness of speech."[9]

4. I infer, lastly, from our Lord's example, the duty which St. Paul urged when he exhorted the Roman christians to "condescend to men of low estate."[1] "I venerate the name of Dr. Franck, of Halle in Saxony," writes Mr. Venn, "who, when a professor of greatest note in that university, felt his bowels yearn over the children of the poor, and became their teacher, though derided by the university for his heavenly compassion. So differently did his God regard the good work, that, from a small beginning, it

7 *Life*, p. 26. See *Orton's Life of Doddridge*, chap. ii.

8 Rom. i. 14. Compare xii. 16.

9 2 Cor. iii. 12. See also 1 Cor. xiv. 19.

1 Rom. xii. 16.

was soon enlarged to be amongst the first charitable foundations, embalming his name for ages to come."[2] Doddridge's ministerial injunctions are as sound as practical on this head—"You must not shun the cottages of the poor, or the chambers of the languishing; nor must you ever be so intent on the more pleasing sounds, as to turn away from the sighs and groans of the distressed. You must often be visiting your brethren, that you may see how they do; and their personal or domestic afflictions must be tenderly weighed, in their various circumstances, that your heart may feel its part, and so prompt you to do all you can, if possible to remove them; or if that be impracticable, as it often will be, at least to alleviate them; and sometimes the sight and conversation of a christian friend does so much to alleviate them, that one would imagine so cheap a charity should not be denied. Let not our Master say, in reference to any of his servants, 'I was sick, and ye visited me not; I was in prison, and ye did not come unto me.'"[3]

But the practice of Felix Neff is yet more exemplary than the precept of Dr. Doddridge. The heart of the Alpine apostle was thoroughly devoted to the spiritual advancement of his

[2] *Correspondence*, p. 248.

[3] Matt. xxv. 43. *Doddridge's Directions for Ministerial Conduct.* Works, vol. iii. p. 205.

mountain flock. "It was his high and lofty ambition to elevate their thoughts and hopes to the noblest objects to which immortal beings can aspire, and to raise the standard, until they should reach to the fulness of the stature of Christ; and yet he so condescended to things of low estate, as to become a teacher of a, b, c, not only to ignorant infancy, but to the dull and unpliant capacities of adults. Beginning with the most tiresome rudiments, he proceeded upwards, leading on his scholars methodically, kindly, and patiently, until he had made them proficients in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and could lead them into the pleasanter paths of music, geography, history, and astronomy. . . . . None but such men as Oberlin and Neff, none but those who, like them, have been under the strong influence of christian motives, have ever done violence to their natural tastes and inclinations, and have left the more agreeable, and equally legitimate duties of their profession, to assume the functions of the humble pedagogue, and of the village dame, and to teach the lowest rudiments to the lowest poor; not before the admiring eyes of the world, but in seclusion, and amidst all the disheartening circumstances of dirt and stench, of chilling cold, or suffocating heat. . . . It was this that led Neff to the dismal solitudes of Dormilleuse, and shut him up with

his twenty-five pupils, and urged him to abandon for a time those pursuits which were most congenial to his mind and habits, in order that he might lay a foundation of knowledge and happiness, and contribute something to the stock of general prosperity in a district, which was separated from the more habitable parts of the world by rocks and mountains, cold and sterility."[4]

[4] *Memoir of Felix Neff, by the Rev. W. S. Gilly*, p. 279, 280, 313.

CHAPTER XIII.

The individual Application of the Preaching of Christ.

Although the Jewish law consisted almost entirely of detached and definite precepts, there was yet nothing in the spirit of it, which approached to what may be called individual application. All its ordinances were general and abstract. With the exception of the regulations respecting the Levites, which referred to that tribe exclusively as forming a distinct and hereditary priesthood, the statutes of the covenant are always addressed collectively to the whole congregation of Israel.

No inconvenience was felt from this generality of the law under the simple form of society, with which that people were conversant. Men who were alternately shepherds or soldiers, as the exigencies of the moment required, were little acquainted with that artificial division of

labour, which the increased wants of more civilized and luxurious ages render necessary; and in proportion as they had fewer relative duties to perform, they stood in need of fewer specific and individual directions. Until the preaching of John the Baptist,[1] we do not find separate classes of men inquiring respecting their own particular duties; and nothing indicates, that their probable ignorance of the immediate obligations attaching to the condition of each, had attracted the attention of their teachers.

The same deficiency of individual application is perceptible in all that is left to us of the heathen moralists. There is a perpetual attempt to define and describe abstract virtues, distinguishing them from their opposite vices, and laying down certain limits

Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum,

but we find nothing addressed to the consciences of characters in particular stations; nothing which steps out of the broad line of generalities, and constrains the reader to enter upon a course of self-examination, and bring home to his own heart those parts of a system of morals, which bear upon his own case with more than common urgency. Among all the remains of antiquity there is not a single essay, which attempts to

[1] See Luke iii. 10—14.

give any thing like a treatise on the duties of men. Nor can an exception be made even in favour of that book,[2] in which, from its professed object, we should most expect to meet with such a specification of the requirements of any given situation. The moralist seems to avoid committing himself, and never digresses into the character of one, who advises with a view to definite duties, or to a particular combination of circumstances. It is only in the pages of the satirists, that any thing exists which approaches to personal address. They did not hesitate to apply very closely general rules to specific persons ; and, consequently, their pen was more felt, and caused a greater sensation than the elaborate moral disquisitions of their rivals the philosophers.[3]

The practice of Christ in this respect differed essentially from both the Jewish and pagan teachers. The plain literalities of his precepts were such, that no class of persons could

2 *Cicero de Officiis.* There are, it is true, certain cases of conscience which are solved, as in the instance of the Alexandrian merchant, and of the pretended fishery, Lib. iii. 12, 14; but, generally speaking, Cicero aims at nothing more than a dry and vague exposition of abstract truths, which are rather calculated to form the basis of a legal code, than to alarm the conscience, and inform the judgment of individual inquirers.

3 See *Juvenal* Sat. viii. 39.

complain that they had been overlooked in the general system; and the exigencies of each case were provided for as carefully, as if they were the sole and exclusive object of his legislation.

That this should be a characteristic feature of the ministry of the Messiah, had been foretold by Isaiah. "The LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."[4] According to the terms of this prophecy, close application was to be a requisite qualification of Christ's preaching. He was to suit his language to the wants of the world at his coming. In fulfilment of this assurance, the good tidings which he announced to the meek were, that they were "blessed," and should "inherit the earth."[5] The broken-hearted would require comfort; and Christ took away their

[4] Isa. lxi. 1, 2. In Wicliff's postill on Luke iv. 18, where this passage is quoted, he remarks, "Christ preached to prisoners the forgiving of their sins; and to men blind in knowledge, sight to know the will of God, and to lead broken men in forgiveness of their travail."

[5] Matt. v. 5.

heaviness, by declaring that there was "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."[6] The captives would sigh after freedom from sin. Christ told them that "the truth should make them free;" and that, "if the Son should make them free they would be free indeed."[7] They who sat in darkness would stand in need of light. Christ announced to them—"I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."[8] They who were dead in trespasses and sin would require to be quickened again into life, and to be reanimated with a fresh spirit, enabling them to perform the functions of their new state of being. And, accordingly, Christ bade them apply to him for this vivifying power —"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."[9]

Here then was the teacher whom the world wanted—bearing a message from God to each; portioning out distinct specifications of duty; and leaving all without excuse for rejecting the application to their own cases, while they readily adapted it to that of others. 'He always had in view the posture of mind of the per-

[6] Luke xv. 10.
[7] John viii. 32, 36.
[8] John viii. 12; xii. 46.
[9] John vi. 63.

sons whom he addressed. He did not entertain the Pharisees with invectives against the open impiety of their Sadducee rivals; nor, on the other hand, did he sooth the Sadducee's ear with descriptions of pharisaical pomp and folly. In the presence of the Pharisees he preached against hypocrisy; to the Sadducees he proved the resurrection of the dead. In like manner, of that known enmity which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, this faithful teacher took no undue advantage, to make friends or proselytes of either. Upon the Jews he inculcated a more comprehensive benevolence. With the Samaritan he defended the orthodoxy of the Jewish creed.'[1]

Hear the boldness of the language in which he reproved the besetting sins of the Pharisees. "Ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition." "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you." "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." "They be blind leaders of the blind." "They say and do not. They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. All their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and

[1] *Archdeacon Paley's Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Carlisle*, 1790.

enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." "Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." "Ye justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts."[2]

Hear his language to the Sadducees. "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?" "As touching the dead, that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; ye therefore do greatly err."[3]

[2] Matt. xv. 3, 7, 14; xvi. 6; xxiii. 3—7, 13—15, 23, 25. Luke xvi. 15.

[3] Mark xii. 24, 26, 27.

To the Herodians—"Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's."[4]

To the Jews as a nation—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."[5]

To the scribes—In the presence of him, who questioned concerning the first commandment, he said—"Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market places, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers."[6]

Addresses of this kind are intelligible to the conscience, because they are directly aimed at the proper mark. They speak to the heart with a plainness and openness which cannot be misunderstood. They specify the characteristic faults of every description of hearers. They expose distinctly and with precision what is inconsistent with christianity in the practice of each, and settle the exact point, where the work of re-

[4] Matt. xxii. 21. [5] Matt. xxiii. 37, 38
[6] Mark xii. 38—40.

formation ought to begin, as well as the spirit in which it should be effected. We may ask, in the language of the apostle, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" In the confusion of our Lord's opponents is fulfilled that scripture which is written, "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."[7]

The same forcible conviction was calculated to attend our Lord's close application of doctrine to the consciences of individuals. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? . . . . If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath-day?"[8] In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, without entering into generals, he points his discourse at that particular sin of which she was guilty, and the direct charge upon her conscience affects her with an immediate sense of her own wickedness. She remained still in her carnal notions whilst

[7] Isa. xlv. 24. 1 Cor. i. 20.

[8] Luke xi. 11—13; xiv. 5. Imitated too by the apostles —'whom *ye* have taken.' 'Ye have crucified.' Acts ii. 23, 36.

he spoke to her of that living water, which would satisfy the thirst of the soul, and spring up to everlasting life. But when he shewed his knowledge of her own personal history, by that searching command—"Go, call thy husband, and come hither"—a consciousness of her sin was awakened within her, and conviction followed. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."[9] Twice in the presence of Judas did Christ plainly declare that the intention of his betrayer was known to him. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"[1] "The Son of man goeth, as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed . . . . Then Judas which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said."[2] So too with regard to the rich man who, notwithstanding his fair professions, was secretly influenced by worldly-mindedness, the penetrating knowledge of our Saviour enabled him to speak at once to the point, and put his character to a decisive test. "It soon appeared that our Lord knew the young ruler well; talked to his thoughts, as we do to each other's words; and that he was not so zealous to do what Jesus should recommend, as he was forward to inquire,

9 John iv. 16—19. [1] Διάβολος, false accuser. John vi. 70.
[2] Matt. xxvi. 24, 25.

like one determined to do something great and extraordinary."[3]

The effect of these searching addresses to the hearts and thoughts of his hearers is discernible in the discovery of character produced by the ministration of Christ. It was said of him by Simeon—"This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, ... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."[4] The prophecy was fulfilled in the offence taken at his doctrine when "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."[5] It was fulfilled also, when the unworthy motive of the people was exposed, who sought him, "not because they saw the miracles, but because they did eat of the loaves, and were filled."[6] Three several instances of detection of insincerity under the veil of a plausible profession of attachment, are recorded in a single chapter. The resolution of the scribe who would have followed our Lord, in pursuit of secular advantages, whithersoever he went, was not strong enough to bear

[3] *Benson's Life of Christ*, p. 300. See an instance of conviction produced by close application of preaching, Acts ii. 22—37. See also the case of Paul before Felix and Drusilla, Acts xxiv. 25.

[4] Luke ii. 34, 35.

[5] John vi. 66.

[6] John vi. 26.

the declaration of Christ, that he "had not where to lay his head." A call to stated and close attendance exposed, in another professed disciple, that secret reluctance to give up all for Christ's sake, which was marked in his request for delay —"Suffer me first to go and bury my father." A third appears to have offered unasked his services as an attendant—"Lord, I will follow thee"—but in his wish to bid farewell to them that were at home, Christ, "who knew what was in man," detected the unstable mind and the lurking preference for worldly connexions; and at once rejected the hypocritical offer—"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In each instance is the right test applied; the chaff is separated from the wheat, the precious discriminated from the vile; but never without preserving the same "meekness of wisdom," and leaving behind an example, especially for the imitation of ministers, of being "gentle unto all men."[7]

Different classes of character were sifted by our Lord with similar success. To the self-righteous, who in their own opinion, needed no repentance, he was always severe.[8] To the publicans and sinners, who drew near to hear him,

[7] Luke ix. 57—62. See also xiv. 25—33.

[8] Matt. xii. 24—45; xv. 1—20; xxiii.

under a sense of their unworthiness, and with real desire of edification, he was encouraging.[9] To the mixed multitude, who flocked after him out of curiosity or interested motives, he discoursed on the terms of true discipleship.[1] None could question his knowledge of their inmost hearts, or fail to remark the appropriateness with which he addressed himself to the exigencies of each individual case.

Nor does it derogate from the real efficacy of Christ's preaching, that so small a part of the Jewish nation received the engrafted word with meekness, and yielded to its power. There is a mental deadness, an incapacity to receive impressions on certain subjects, which is well represented in scripture by the image of an hard and beaten wayside path, and well exemplified in the obstinacy of Jewish unbelief. Take the Jew of the present day, and he will exhibit the same example of moral insensibility, which was evinced by his forefathers under the ministry of Jesus. Place before him in all their minute and particular details, the circumstantial incidents of the birth and life and death of the child of promise and the man of sorrows, predicted in his own scriptures;—shew him the inconsistencies and contrarieties of character, apparently impossible and irreconcileable, which meet in

[9] Luke xv. [1] Luke xiv. 25—35.

the person of Jesus, and of him alone;—shew him the historical exactness, with which the events of his ministry are foretold, not in vague and general terms, such as the wisdom of a lying prophet would have selected, but in language often unequivocally, sometimes exclusively, referring to Christ;[2]—shew him the gradual revelations, by which the nature of the Messiah was unfolded, new features being added by each successive prophet, (features which could be neither borrowed or deduced from anterior predictions,[3]) till it was finally announced, that the seed of the woman, which, forty centuries before, had been appointed to bruise the serpent's head, should spring from the line of David in the village of Bethlehem;—take the very chapter and the line of argument to which Philip was directed in his discourse with the Æthiopian eunuch, and which has been blessed to the conversion of a well-known infidel of our own country;[4]—open and allege to him, as the manner of Paul was in the synagogues, "that

[2] See Isa. liii. Ps. ii. 7, compared with Acts xiii. 33. Ps. ii. 12; xvi. 10; cx. 1. Acts ii. 13.

[3] See *Mr. Benson's Hulsean Lectures* for 1820, p. 164. The view suggested by Mr. Benson has been ably pursued by the Rev. A. Cooper in a small publication entitled, *The Gradual Developement of the Offices, Titles, and Character of Christ in the Prophets, a proof of their Inspiration.*

[4] See *Burnet's Life of Lord Rochester.*

Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead ;"—testify to him with St. Peter, that " to him give all the prophets witness,"—or, after the sanction of still higher authority, like our Lord to the two disciples going to Emmaus, expound to him " in all the scriptures the things concerning Christ, beginning at Moses and the prophets :" [5] he will still maintain that the hope of Israel is not yet come, and amid the fulness of light, and the completion of prophecy, and the concurrence of evidence satisfactory to the most wise and inquiring among men, he will hold fast to his judicial error, will tread under foot the good seed, will declare in his outcast condition among all the nations of the earth—" we look for another."

But though in such quarters the effect of a ministry, however closely pressed on the conscience, and applied to the particular case, be sometimes not apparent, the practice of our Lord determines the conduct that ought to be pursued. The very hardness of the soil suggests a motive for increased exertion, and renewed culture. Why is Paul to plant, and Apollos to water, leaving the result to him, who, when he pleases, and to whom he pleases, can give the increase? and why are we to cast our bread even upon the waters, and to sow our seed in the

[5] Luke xxiv. 27. Acts xvii. 3 ; x. 43.

morning, and in the evening not to withhold the hand, but because we know not which is the way of the Spirit, what capabilities of fruitfulness lie beneath the surface, what labours may yet be rendered efficacious under the blessing of the heavenly husbandman? Why is line to be reiterated upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little, except on the supposition that to the most impenetrable and unpromising field may yet be assigned eventually its proper seed time, and its proper measure of productiveness?

Imitation of Christ in the particular which has been considered, will lead the minister,

1. To discrimination in preaching. The distinction between acceptance and rejection of salvation, as offered in the gospel, and their respective consequences, will be clearly marked out. The way of life will be so distinguished from the way of death, that none shall mistake; justification and condemnation will be shown to have their evidencing characters; the precious will be taken forth from the vile,[6] and the mirror held faithfully before the face of each, that all may see in the testimony borne by the witness within them, what manner of men they are.

In Christ's discourse with Nicodemus, he took occasion to enforce this point with peculiar

[6] Jer. xv. 19.

earnestness, perhaps on account of the timidity and want of decision which marked the approaches of this convert to the divine teacher, or perhaps, as has been suggested, in warning to his colleagues of the sanhedrim—"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."[7] At the end of the sermon on the mount the two classes of hearers are again distinctly divided, and the passage may be considered as a model of practical address in the way of personal application to the different characters of which a congregation is composed. It is an emblem of that final discrimination which shall take place at that great day, when all people shall be gathered before the judge, and he shall separate them the one from the other.[8]

[7] John iii. 18. See also 19—21. "Our Lord insisted on this subject in very solemn terms at the close of the conference, probably that he might leave an awful impression upon the mind of Nicodemus, and that from him the other members of the sanhedrim might be warned of their danger, if they should continue in unbelief. The ministers of Christ, in like manner, should admonish their hearers, and draw the same line of distinction between them."—*Robinson's Scripture Characters*, vol. ii. p. 319.

[8] See a judicious chapter on this subject in *Bridges's Christian Ministry*, part iv. chap. iv. sect. v. Thus too Baxter, in a striking passage—"In public, how skilful and diligent should we be in opening the hearts of sinners to them-

At the same time the preacher must be careful not to anticipate that day by a premature and hasty attempt to set apart and distinguish visibly the tares from the wheat. It has been said to him—"Let both grow together until the harvest."[9] He must leave the final award to that man who has been ordained for this very

selves! The pulpit is but one candlestick, from which we should diffuse the holy light into all the assembly: not speaking the same things of all that are before us, as if it were our work to trouble men, or only to comfort them; but as the same light will shew every man the things which he beholdeth in their varieties and differences; (we see by the same sun a man to be a man, and a beast to be a beast, and a bird to be a bird;) so the same word of truth which we deliver must be so discovering and discriminating, as to manifest the ungodly to be ungodly, and the carnal to be carnal; the worldling to be a worldling; the hypocrite to be a hypocrite, and the enemies of holiness to be as they are; and the sincere to be sincere, and the renewed soul to be indeed renewed. The same light must shew the excellency of sanctification, and the filthiness of sin; the glory of the image of Christ, and the deformity of that spiritual death which is its privation. It must shew the righteous to be 'more excellent than his neighbour,' (Prov. xii. 26,) and help men to 'discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.' (Mal. iii. 18.)"—On *The Mischiefs of Self-Ignorance, and Benefits of Self-Acquaintance*, Works, vol. xvi.

9 Matt. xiii. 30. "Men are such hasty reformers, that if they cast out evil, they cast out some good along with it. When tares are plucked up, the wheat is always in danger."—*Jones's Life of Bp. Horne.*

end.[1] He must shew the sinner, individually, to himself, not to the world. He must send him into the vineyard, if he will yet be hired, even at the eleventh hour. He must be careful also to discriminate between men, and the accidents of their situations. Elijah thought that he was left alone amid the universal defection of the idolatrous Israelites, when there were seven thousand men, known to God, who had not bowed the knee to Baal.[2] Matthew and Zaccheus were among the publicans, but were not therefore to be arraigned as sinners and extortioners. There was a "devout man, and one that feared God with all his house" among the Roman soldiers.[3] "A wise preacher," therefore, "like St. John, should distinguish the abuses of any state or condition of life from the condition itself."[4]

2. Boldness of application will characterise the preacher who follows in the spirit of his Master's teaching. Christ's opponents bore witness to his boldness—"We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou re-

[1] Acts xvii. 31.

[2] 1 Kings xix. 10, 18, compared with Rom. xi. 2—4.

[3] Acts x. 2.

[4] *Bp. Horne,* quoting *Quesnel* on Luke iii. 12, 13.

gardest not the person of men."[5] He was the lion of the tribe of Judah, which "turned not away for any."[6]

His apostles did not scruple to hold up men in their true characters with similar boldness. They caution the converts against "grievous wolves,"[7] "dogs,"[8] "deceitful workers."[9] The indignant address of St. Paul to Elymas[1] is conceived in the same tone of strong direct reprehension. Like him of whom it is written in praise, that "he was not moved with the presence of any prince, neither could any bring him into subjection," "he stood up as fire, and his word burned like a lamp."[2] But let it be remembered that Elias the prophet "was ordained for reproofs."[3] Paul and the apostles were "filled

[5] Matt. xxii. 16.
[6] Prov. xxx. 30.
[7] Acts xx. 29.
[8] Phil. iii. 2.
[9] 2 Cor. xi. 13.

[1] Acts xiii. 9, 10. Compare with this Polycarp's answer to Marcion's appeal—'Polycarp, own us.' 'I do own thee—to be the first-born of Satan.'

[2] Ecclus. xlviii. 1, 12.

[3] Ecclus. xlviii. 10. "Elias was endued with an extraordinary spirit, in the freedom whereof he did what he then did, (2 Kings i. 10, 12,) but it is not for you or others to propose his example, unless you can demonstrate his spirit."—*Bp. Sanderson's Sermon ad Clerum* on Rom. iii. 8. On the marked distinction between our Lord's authoritative manner, as one who knew what was in man, and the tone of address adopted by the apostles, see *Miller's Bampton Lectures*, Lect. vi.

with the Holy Ghost;"[4] and the fervent language of their reprobation will rarely be found suitable to fallible men, whose lips are not under the immediate guidance of inspiration. A spirit of love is especially needed in dealing reproof.[5] The wound must be inflicted tenderly, as a father chastens his child. Still there must be truth in this love, as well as love in the truth. There must be a boldness of declaration. There must be the bearing of an open testimony, without respect of persons, and whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, that "the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience."[6] The preacher is the delegate of Christ to "testify of the world that the works thereof are evil."[7] The world will perhaps hate him for his faithfulness, and the biography of christian ministers furnishes many an affecting evidence of the prevalence of this hatred; but it hated Christ before it hated them, for the self-same cause. If his duty call upon him to be bold in reproof, he must not shrink from it on account

[4] Acts xiii. 9.

[5] "Does any young minister who may read this account wish to ask how this peace and prosperity was produced? I can tell him that it was effected by the blessing of God upon the practice of his own rule—'speaking the truth in love.'" —*Cecil's Life of Cadogan.*

[6] Col. iii. 6. [7] John vii. 7.

of the consequences. Christ did not see fit to prevent the enmity of the world from following his own reproofs; and has thus forewarned his pastors what to expect, and taught them how to act.

3. Again, there must be a trial of various modes of promoting self-application and examination. No experiment must be neglected. The use of one motive need not supersede that of another. Christ employed very different means at different times for this purpose. Sometimes he had recourse to topics drawn peculiarly from evangelical truths ;[9] sometimes from the obligations of the law.[1] Sometimes he reserved his hard sayings for the initiated, as it were ; and told his disciples apart from the multitude what the people at large were not yet able to receive.[2] Sometimes he did not scruple to bring forward some of the highest doctrines of the gospel before auditories composed of a promiscuous assemblage of people.[3]

Different modes of treatment also occur in

9 John vi. 37.

1 Matt. v. 17—47; xix. 16—21. Luke xvii. 10.

2 Mark iv. 10—12, 33, 34.

3 For instance, predestination and election, John vi. 24—65 —the universality of the offer of the gospel without respect of persons, Matt. xi. 28—30; John vii. 37—the promises assured to faith in opposition to the covenant of works, John vi. 28, 29.

our Lord's ministry, according to the circumstances of the persons. When the tempter asked a sign—"if thou be the Son of God cast thyself down"—our Lord refused it.[4] On two occasions, when the Pharisees asked a sign, it was denied them with a reproof.[5] But when Peter, in the sincerity of a weak faith, made a similar request—"Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water"—the prayer was granted.[6]

Here then will be scope for the preacher's judgment. The avenues are not the same to every heart, and in proportion to his knowledge of human nature will be his success in fitting his arrow to the string. The ways are various; the end is the same—the promotion of a spirit of self-application. "For those who have not informed their minds by education, the plainest way is certainly the best and hardest, provided it be not flat, and dry, and incoherent, or desultory, going from one point to another, without pursuing any particular point home to practice, and applying it to the consciences of the hearers. And give me leave to tell you, that mere general discourses have commonly little effect on the people's mind; if any thing moves them, it is particular application as to such things which

[4] Matt. iv. 6, 7. [5] Matt. xii. 38—40; xvi. 1—4.
[6] Matt. xiv. 28.

their consciences are concerned in."[7] To the same effect is an excellent remark of Bishop Burnet—"That it is not the best sermon that makes the hearers go away talking to one another, and praising the speaker; but that which makes them go away thoughtful, and serious, and hastening to be alone."[8]

4. There can be no close application of scriptural truth to the conscience, while the hearers remain in a dull and apathetic state, with their intelligence unawakened, and their mental energies unexercised. The dormant faculties must be called into action. The sleeper must be roused from his lethargy by sounds for which his ear is adapted. He must be appealed to in language level to his understanding.

One of the most effective of our modern preachers has given the result of his own ex-

[7] *Bp. Stillingfleet on the Duties and Rights of the Parochial Clergy.* Works, vol. iii. p. 627.

[8] Quoted by Dr. Witherspoon in his sermon, entitled "*Ministerial Fidelity in declaring the whole counsel of God,*" on Acts xx. 26, 27. *Innes's Christian Ministry,* p. 197. See also the observations on the composition of a sermon in Bp. Horne's Life. "A writer, strong in his expressions, affirms that a sermon without an application does no more good than the singing of a skylark: it may teach, but it does not impel; and though the preacher may be under concern for his audience, he does not shew it till he turns the subject to their immediate advantage."—*Jones's Life of Bishop Horne,* p. 139.

perience on this subject. "The total inefficacy of the common strain of preaching I ascribe, in part, to its being too studied, and too general; and whilst all the other sciences are flourishing and improving, because all the appeal is to experiments, in divinity this only sensible method is quite neglected. I have several shepherds and shepherdesses who attend; they prick up their ears when I am proving that a shepherd or his boy, though he cannot read a word, is not at all further removed from the knowledge and delightful enjoyment of God, than a scholar or a gentleman; they seem struck with the glad tidings, when I prove this to them by the instances of the poor shepherds of Bethlehem, the poor widow in the gospel, and the slaves mentioned in 1 Cor. xii. 13."[9] It is related of another minister, also of great eminence in point of effect, that "his diction, like that of the original he studied, was so plain and perspicuous, that the meanest of his hearers might clearly understand him."[1]

9 *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 182. "To render his addresses the more appropriate, he was frequent in his pastoral visits, and took a lively interest in the circumstances of his flock. At an ordination he thus commended the same habit —'Be familiar with your people, not high, or strange. Converse with them for their good. Acquaint yourselves with the state of their souls; their temptations, their infirmities.'"— *Life of Matthew Henry*, p. 124.

1 *Life of Cadogan*, p. 70.

It becomes essential therefore to the success of a christian ministry, that public teaching be followed up with the private and individual inquiry —"Understandest thou what thou readest?"[2] After our Lord had washed the disciples' feet, he put this question to them—"Know ye what I have done to you?"[3] Such must be the pastor's question to his flock. He must not suffer the daily worshipper to become a formalist. He must remind his people of the inward and spiritual grace conveyed in the outward and visible sign. He must see that they receive the instruction of the church in an intelligent spirit, and are able to give a reason for the hope that is in them. This cannot be, in ordinary parochial charges, except through the medium of systematic pastoral visitings, quite independent of, and supplemental to the public offices of the sanctuary. And here again our Lord has set the example. He did not confine his teaching to the ministrations of the synagogue, or the seat in Moses' chair; but resorted to interlocutory discourses on every opportunity when two or three were gathered together; whether on the shore, on the mountain, or in the city; in the midst of friends or of foes; at Jacob's well, in the house of Zaccheus or Levi, at the supper with his disciples, or in the way going up to

[2] Acts viii. 30. [3] John xiii. 12.

Jerusalem or Emmaus. In St. Paul's charge to the elders of Ephesus, he twice reminds them how he taught "from house to house," and "ceased not for the space of three years to warn every one, night and day, with tears."[4] And in writing to the Corinthians, he appeals to their knowledge of his personal sympathy with the feelings of every private christian among their whole body, notwithstanding the multiplicity of his ordinary duties—"Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"[5] Does this imply an identification of interests at which a successor of the apostles cannot aim?[6] Does it involve too burthensome an exaction of

[4] Acts xx. 20, 31. [5] 2 Cor. xi. 29.

[6] At the head of the rules which Cotton Mather laid down for the more private discharge of his ministry and the edification of his flock, was the following. "1st. To keep a list of all the members of his church, and to go over it, by parcels at a time, in his secret prayers—supplicating the most suitable blessing he could think of for each person in particular. Not only did he observe this rule in his daily prayers, but he every now and then set apart a whole day for fasting and prayer on his church's account; and on such days he used to pray for every member of his church by name, though they amounted to nearly four hundred. For his own direction in these his private prayers for his flock, he used to take the bills that were put up in the congregation with him into his study; and there he would go over the several cases in his secret prayers and thanksgivings, more particularly than he did, or could do, in public."—*Life of Cotton Mather.*

his time and strength? "Where should the shepherd be but with his flock? What avail public instructions, if the detail be not filled up in private? Where is the christianity we profess, if it be exhausted in a few formal and brief exhibitions, and do not descend into the daily life? How little do the body of the people understand of our elaborate compositions, unless by catechetical instructions, by private expositions, by application of truth to the individual conscience, we make them intelligible?"[7]

[7] *Bp. Daniel Wilson's Evidences*, Lect. xxvi. This is one of the features in Chaucer's description of his "Good man of religion," *Prologue to Canterbury Tales.*

"Wide was his parish, and houses far asonder,
But he ne left nought, for ne rain ne thonder;
In sickness and in mischief to visite,
The ferrest in his parish, moche and lite,
Upon his fete, and in his hand a staff."

See the whole description of this "poor parson of a town, but rich of holy thought and work," in whose portrait the poet is supposed to have delineated the character of Wicliff.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Effects of Christ's Ministry.

When our Saviour was asked by one of the multitude—"Lord, are there few that be saved?"—he did not judge it expedient to answer the question otherwise than by advising his follower to make a serious use of the inquiry for the promotion of his own individual salvation. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," he replied; "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."[1]

[1] Luke xiii. 23,24. Bp. Copleston, in remarking on this passage, notices the caution of our Lord with respect to a disclosure of future events. He quotes, in illustration of this reserve, the answers to Peter's question, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John xxi. 21—23.) and to the inquiry of the disciples immediately before the ascension, (Acts i. 6—8.)—*An Enquiry into the Doctrines of Necessity and Predestination*, Discourse iv.

Yet, though our Lord was pleased on this occasion to repress the idle curiosity of his hearer, he has not left us altogether without the means of forming some conclusions respecting the awful subject of his inquiry. He has taught us, both plainly and figuratively, that his Father's flock is a little one. The inadequate effect produced by the gospel on those to whom it was first preached, compared with the sensation excited by the appearance of its author—the small number of disciples obtained by our Lord during his personal ministry—were presages, which have been but too surely fulfilled in all succeeding times, that there are obstacles prevailing in the hearts of the great majority of hearers, which oppose an effectual barrier against the reception of the doctrines of christianity. In particular, the parable of the sower bears witness to the afflicting truth, that, even when the good seed is sown by the Son of man himself, three-fourths of it are lost through the barrenness of the soil by the wayside, or on stony places, or among thorns.

But, although our Lord thus intimated, that the immediate harvest should not make a return corresponding with the pains bestowed by the husbandman, yet it had been promised of old, that the word which went forth out of his mouth should not all return unto him void, or fail to

prosper in that whereunto it was sent.[2] There should be at least "an handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains," which, by the special blessing of God, should be increased at last into that "great multitude" seen in the heavenly vision, "which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and peoples, and tongues."[3] "Other seed," therefore, says the evangelist, "fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold."[4] Thus we see that nothing springs spontaneously even on the good ground; and the sower sowed there also, because the earth, even where best, can bring forth nothing without seed and culture. All pretensions at variance with this truth must be silenced, and the universal want of that adoption into the family of God which enables us to cry, "Abba, Father," must be acknowledged, before those true spiritual fruits can be produced, which testify, that our hopes are rooted and established in faith on Christ.

I. It must be admitted, however, that the direct conviction produced by our Saviour's teaching, was confined to a few; and it is too remarkable a feature in his ministry to be passed

[2] Isa. lv. 11. [3] Rev. vii. 9.

[4] Matt. xiii. 8.

unnoticed. There is no stronger proof that nothing less than a pentecostal effusion of divine grace, as it were, can suffice to melt the heart of stone, and substitute an heart of flesh. "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him."[5] And, after noticing this fact, the evangelist attributes the extraordinary unbelief of the Jews to the blindness of their eyes and the hardness of their hearts. Christ himself gives the same reason for their neglect of him, and founds on it an express charge against them—"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."[6]

If indeed we look to the success of the most eminent preachers, the result will appear very disproportionate to what might have been expected from their labours, even from the earliest periods of sacred history. We know that Noah, though "a preacher of righteousness," testified with so little effect against a world lying in wickedness, that, when God looked upon the earth, "all flesh had corrupted his way upon it," and he only and his family were found righteous before the Lord in the whole of that generation.[7] We know that, though just Lot, dwelling among the wicked, "in seeing and hearing, vexed his righ-

[5] John xii. 37. [6] John v. 40.

[7] Gen. vi. 12; vii. 1. 2 Pet. ii. 5.

teous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds," yet he was so far from prevailing in any degree to turn them from the error of their ways, that there were not ten righteous men found in all Sodom, to redeem the city from destruction.[8]

It was a similar defection of the people which rendered the duty of the prophets so discouraging. In the time of Elijah, one alone appeared openly for the Lord, and there seem to have been in all the congregations of Israel no more than "seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal." Even of this scanty remnant but a very small proportion was known to the prophet.[9] So too Isaiah, though the Spirit of the Lord was poured upon him so fully, that he has obtained the title of the evangelical prophet, was yet constrained to exclaim in the bitterness of his disappointed hopes for his countrymen,—"Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"—a passage to which St. John has referred as a prediction, in its secondary sense at least, of the little effect which would attend the promulgation of the gospel, even when preached by the lips of him who spake as never man spake, and attested as

[8] Gen. xviii. 32. 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

[9] 1 Kings xix. 14—18.

to its truth by all the signs and wonders which accompanied its first delivery.[1]

Lastly, though John continued to the end "a burning and a shining light," his lamp still bright in the candlestick of the church, and his oil not wasting, yet the people were willing only "for a season to rejoice in his light."[2] Their affections changed and their zeal abated, though he was still the same earnest and faithful instrument in the hand of the Lord, whom they had received at first with so much favour. And when we add to these instances of the failure of means provided by God for the admonition of his people, that, at the time of our Lord's ascension, the number of his disciples seems to have amounted to little more than an hundred and twenty souls,[3] let christian ministers learn the lesson to which their attention is thus forcibly directed, not to live on the breath of popular credit, but to seek the honour which cometh from God only.

[1] Isa. liii. 1. John xii. 37, 38. "Take for an example of suffering affliction, on this account, the prophets; how small was their success! Our business is only 'to declare the whole counsel of God,'—to live the life of a minister—and not to cease praying. Our reward is sure—our record is on high. We must not expect to be happier in our work than the most distinguished of the servants of God."—*Venn's Correspondence*, p. 380.

[2] John v. 35. [3] Acts i. 15.

Nor, if the immediate results of Christ's own ministry were so inconsiderable, is there reason for discouragement, though the usefulness of inferior workers in God's vineyard do not always appear to correspond with their expectations. If times occur when their labours seem to be less acceptable to the people, or less owned of God, let it not be a cause for relaxation in diligence, or for despondency in spirit, or for remission in prayer. Let it rather be an argument for renewed energy, for greater zeal and earnestness. Like Abraham, let us become yet more importunate in pleading for our charge, in proportion as the light of God's countenance seems to be hidden, and the number of those righteous men diminishes, whose presence might have redeemed the remainder from the divine judgments. Let it ever be remembered that "the Lord saith to him who is received into his joy, not 'Well done, successful, but good and faithful, servant.' The former epithet has not been applicable to many of his dearest ministers; the two latter, to all."[4]

Suppose, however, the good seed to have been sown, and that signs of germination have been discerned, the husbandman's task is only begun, and much will probably arise to put his patience to the proof, ere he arrive at the consummation of his hopes for a spiritual harvest. The ground-

[4] *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 394.

work is laid, on which the christian character is to be formed, but something more is requisite, before the expected fruits are seen to ripen into maturity. There must be not only a fitness in the soil for the reception of the seed, but depth enough to retain it, and strength enough to nourish it, and genial warmth enough from without to invigorate the plant in its gradual progress towards perfection. The march of the believer must be progressive and consistent. His face must be set stedfastly upwards towards the heavenly Jerusalem. Not only must his faith "endure for awhile," but it must have that characteristic distinction of vital christianity, which its divine author has pointed out as essential—"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."[5]

The earliest converts, who had Christ for their personal teacher, enjoyed the high privilege of knowing, that Jesus, who was the author, would be also the finisher of their faith. He who originally implanted in their heart the good seed, was pledged to watch over it with a

[5] John viii. 31. Among the corruptions of falling Rome, Seneca saw enough of the transient nature of all good feelings which were founded on no higher motives than such as natural religion can suggest. He has left this lesson. *Non quid dicat, sed quid sentiat, refert; nec quid uno die sentiat, sed quid assidue.*—Epist. 9.

care and culture, which should only end when all was "ripe for the harvest." Under his fostering hand, the apostle, called from his ordinary employment, from his ship and nets, or from the receipt of custom, grew up before him as a tender plant, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear—till the character which, in its commencing state, was rather promising than productive, brought forth its seasonable fruit, according to its measure of fertility, "some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold."

Nor were these effects confined to the immediate attendants on our Lord's earthly ministry. Wherever the good seed is sown in good ground, a similar process and a similar result take place throughout all ages. The inward man is renewed day by day, in knowledge, after the image of his redeemer. If Satan be on the watch to catch the seed, the believer has the more need of divine aid to frustrate his vigilance, and disappoint his malice. If there be danger of falling away in time of temptation, he will apply the more earnestly to the source of spiritual strength for refreshment and support. If a right principle alone can sanction his actions, and hallow their tendency, he will examine the motives which influence his conduct, to see whether, like the good seed in the good ground,

he have root in himself. He traces the lineaments of the christian character in its gradual formation, and in its different bearings. He brings forth his fruit "with patience," matured by many a sun, and swelled by the rain that cometh oft upon it, in opposition to the quick but unseasonable produce of the stony ground, which, like Jonah's gourd, sprang up in a night, and perished as speedily. Indeed, scripture insists much on this particular. The "tree planted by the rivers of water, bringeth forth his fruit in his season." "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." "I have ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."[6]

Take as an example of the gradual opening of the mind under divine teaching, the case of Luther. "In his early years he took on himself the vows of an Augustin monk, and, to use his own words, was a 'most mad papist.' . . . . At the age of three-and-twenty the business of his monastery carried him to Rome. He saw there more than was expedient . . . . and he returned to Saxony from his mission 'with thoughts arising in his heart.' He betook himself to the study of the scriptures, with Erasmus for his help; with whose system of interpretation, however, he does not seem to have been

[6] Ps. i. 3; xcii. 14. John xv. 16.

entirely satisfied. He felt an increasing dislike of the schoolmen, and soon entertained a suspicion, which, by degrees, ripened into a conviction, of the truth of that doctrine which proved afterwards the burden of his preaching,—justification by faith in Christ only . . . . Extravagance like this (the open sale of indulgences in the gross to the best bidders) called up Luther, excited his honest indignation, and drove him to write. He had no notion where this first step was to lead him . . . . Still he had little idea how much he would have to unlearn. He did not question, for instance, the pope's supremacy, till Eckius, one of his indiscreet antagonists, provoked him to scrutinize the question . . . . On he went, feeling his way, and light continued to break in upon him. Two years later than the time when he wrote against indulgences . . . . he had no intention to separate from the apostolic see. He examines the decretals; and then he whispers in his friend's ear that he begins to suspect the pope to be anti-christ. He ponders somewhat longer, and he now acquaints him that he has not much doubt of the fact; and shortly after this . . . . he throws away the scabbard."[7]

Take as another instance the gradual manner in which Mr. Scott's views were cleared. He has given himself in his "Force of Truth" an af-

7 *Blunt's History of the Reformation in England*, chap. v.

fecting and instructive record of the consequences of an honest and laborious investigation of the truth, in successively establishing his opinions on the great doctrines of the gospel. As one of his friends observes, "it reminds the reader of the early history of Luther, and of the painful working out of his own way by intense prayer and study of the scriptures which distinguished that great reformer .... We here behold a man of strong natural powers, intrenched in the sophistries of human pride, and a determined opponent of almost all the chief truths of the gospel, gradually convinced and subdued. We see him engaging in a laborious study of the scripture with opinions and prejudices firmly fixed, and reluctant to admit a humiliating scheme of theology; yet borne on, contrary to his expectations and wishes and worldly interest, by simple energy of truth. We view him arriving, to his own dismay, at one doctrine after another. We behold him making every step sure as he advances, till he at length works out, by his own diligent and most anxious investigation of the sacred volume, all the parts of divine truth, which he afterwards discovered to be the common faith of the church of Christ, to be the foundation of all the reformed communities, and to be essentially united with every part of divine reve-

lation."[8] Mr. Scott mentions in one of his letters his anticipation of a change of heart in one of his near relatives in a similar manner. He states his hope "that, under the guidance and secret teaching of the Holy Spirit, gradually opening her understanding to understand the scriptures, and disclosing more and more what passes in her own heart, and what is revealed in the bible, she will seem to discover it of herself."[9] The event, under the gracious leading of God, did not disappoint his expectation.

Mr. Cecil's mind, as we learn from his friend and biographer, was also opened very gradually to the truth of the gospel, and prepared by a process, no less remarkable than instructive, for further communications of mercy.[1]

A serious reflection on these proofs of the freedom of the divine power, which sometimes flashes sudden conviction into the heart, as on Saul journeying to Damascus, sometimes instils, as it were, drop by drop, converting grace into the soul, will tend to prevent disappointment in various ways. It will preserve us from entertaining too sanguine expectations of a show of goodness, which "is as

[8] *Wilson's Sermons,* vol. i. p. 493.

[9] *Life of Rev. T. Scott,* p. 138.

[1] *Remains of Rev. R. Cecil,* p. 8, 9.

a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."[2] It will teach us not to look for the works of the perfect man from the babe in Christ—to be more anxious for steady and consistent affections, than for a sudden flame, the fierceness of which, like a fire among thorns, is soon extinguished—to aim at the full developement of all the christian graces, without despising what is called in scripture "the day of small things"[3]—it will teach us, finally, that, under the ordinary operations of the Spirit, "there is a progressive attainment of knowledge, and a growth of principle in the hearts of such as he is training up in the way they should go, which successively develope as the infant advances to childhood, the child to youth, and the youth to man."[4]

II. The gospels show, that the authoritative tone adopted by our Lord often produced a partial effect in his favour.

It was consistent with the nature and short duration of his ministry, that impression should be a characteristic feature of his teaching,[5] and he therefore generally rested the truth of what he said on authority. This would be the more striking, when the dignity and commanding tone

[2] Hos. vi. 4. [3] Zech. iv. 10.

[4] *Memoirs of Rev. Legh Richmond*, p. 408.

[5] *Paley, Evid.* vol. ii. p. 50.

of his discourses were contrasted with the meanness of his rank in society. The carpenter's reputed son, whose parentage all his countrymen knew, and whose opportunities of learning had apparently not exceeded those of others in his situation, spake of Moses as a lawgiver, whose precepts he had an undisputed right to explain, or extend, or abrogate at his pleasure. The traditions and corruptions of the moral law were set aside without scruple by one, who had not where to lay his head. The possession of a kingdom and seats on thrones were confidently promised by a despised Galilean, who had not wherewithal to pay the Roman tribute out of his own resources. In the midst of all this apparent external destitution, his language was that of a teacher invested with absolute and decisive power. "I say unto you—swear not at all." "I say unto you—resist not evil." "I say unto you—love your enemies." "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away." "I give unto you power over all the power of the enemy." "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world." "Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee." "I give my sheep eternal life." "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am."[6] All these expressions imply an

[6] Matt. v. 34, 39, 44; xxiv. 35. Luke x. 19. John vi. 35; viii. 10—12; x. 28; xiii. 13.

unqualified right on the part of the speaker to teach and legislate from authority. Only the possession of such a right could warrant the use of such language; and the proof of that possession was to be given at another time, and by a concurrence of independent circumstances.

The effect produced upon the people by this tone of superiority, was a sense of wonder. "The people were astonished at his doctrine." "They asked, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."[7] And this was precisely what might have been expected from their ignorance under the teaching of the scribes, and the debasement of their understandings under the corruption of sin.

The effect produced on the avowed enemies of Christ, was sometimes awe, sometimes fury and hatred. The officers sent to apprehend him returned with their purpose unexecuted, and declared that never man spake like this man. Some of the dwellers at Jerusalem remarked, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. As he taught in the temple, no man laid hands on him. As soon as he had said to the soldiers employed by the Jews to take him, I am he,

[7] Matt. vii. 28; xiii. 54. Luke iv. 22.

they went backward and fell to the ground.[8] Yet this involuntary homage paid to our Lord's personal dignity did not prevent the scribes and pharisees from being filled with rage at his words, and betraying that they were stung to the soul with a conviction of their justice. So too when he asserted his authority over the sabbath, and, by consequence, his co-equality with God, "the Jews sought the more to kill him."[9]

On his friends the effect was of another kind. If it did not inspire them with confidence, it prepared them to entertain some hopes that he would fulfil his words; if it did not take away every remaining root of unbelief, it led them to ponder his sayings in their hearts, and remember them afterwards with profit, when their feeble expectations were more than realized. But it was principally what he did, and not what he said, that influenced his hearers, whether friends or foes. It was rather his miracles than his doctrine that produced conviction. The men of Capernaum did not ask him to preach to them, but to do signs.[1] It was by the earthquake, and the things which were done, that the centurion and soldiers at the cross were constrained to acknowledge him the Son of God.[2]

[8] John vii. 25, 46; viii. 20; xviii. 6.

[9] John v. 18. [1] John vi. 30. [2] Matt. xxvii. 54.

Nor could this have been otherwise, consistently with the divine decrees; since the foundation of Christ's kingdom was to be laid "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."[3] It was intended, therefore, that our Lord should offer the evidence of his mission as much to the senses of the Jews, as to their understandings. Illustration and exposition were not within his immediate province. He furnished the subject of the work, and materials for it, and it became the duty of others to combine and arrange and explain, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whose office it was to bring to their remembrance whatever they had heard or seen. Hence there is a sameness and simplicity in the terms used by the evangelists when speaking of Christ's preaching, which are no longer preserved when St. Luke is describing the ministry of the apostles. When the subject relates to Christ, it is commonly said, that he came "preaching the gospel of the kingdom"—or "teaching in the synagogue"—or, still more simply and energetically, that "he spake the word," or "talked to the people."[4] Twice it is said of him, that "he expounded to his disciples,"[5] and once St. Mark

[3] 1 Cor. ii. 4. [4] Matt. xii. 46.

[5] Mark iv. 34. Luke xxiv. 27. In the Greek the word in the first passage is ἐπέλυε, in the second διηρμήνευεν. Our translators have used the word, *expounded*, in both verses.

says, that one of the scribes had heard him "reasoning with the Sadducees."[6] On the other hand, considering the unpretending style of the sacred historians, the variety of terms employed to describe the preaching of the apostles presents a remarkable contrast to their simplicity, when speaking of their Master. Apollos "convinced"—Peter "testified" and "exhorted"—Paul "disputed"—"persuaded"—"confirmed" and "exhorted"—"comforted"—"reasoned out of the scriptures"—"warned" and "shewed all things"—"expounded" and "testified, preaching the kingdom of God," and "teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ."[7] Here there is an alternate appeal to the affections and the judgment, to the reason and the sympathies of their hearers; shewing that the time had arrived for enlisting in the cause of Christ all the faculties of the human mind, and that his ministers were not to omit any argument, which, on the one hand, could reach and soften the heart, or which could enlighten the understanding and convince the head, on the other.

But it is not by its immediate results, that the effect of Christ's preaching can be properly

[6] Mark xii. 28.

[7] Acts ii. 40; ix. 29; xiii. 43; xiv. 22; xvi. 40; xvii. 2, 17; xviii. 4, 5, 19, 28; xix. 8, 9; xx. 31, 35; xxiv. 25; xxviii. 23, 31.

estimated. He abstained from conquests himself, that his praise might be perfected out of the mouth of those weak and humble agents, who were to be the preachers of his gospel; and in whose success we are to acknowledge the power of him whose commission they bore. Their lips were touched with a live coal from the altar, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Single discourses of his apostles were destined to add more to the church than the whole of the Saviour's ministry. Even where he was most admired, the hearers profited little by his preaching. The evangelist says of some, "They were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power;"[8] and yet the inhabitants of this very city were singled out by our Lord as an instance of extraordinary impenitence. Such is the value of popular applause, and of the praise which cometh of men. They who prize it, may remember with profit the regard that was paid to Simon Magus, "to whom all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God."[9] It was otherwise with respect to our Lord's ministry. Ages were to roll away, before the spark which was then lighted should be kindled into a great fire, and make its influence to be felt, wherever there were hearts to be melted into love, or delivered

[8] Luke iv. 32. [9] Acts viii. 10.

from error. For the real and glorious triumphs of his dispensation, we must look to the silent progress of his doctrines, gradually spreading through a wider circle, and transforming by their vital efficacy those who were by nature children of wrath, into sons of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

That the change in the world which dates its origin from the preaching of Christ, was a change from a state of great corruption to a state of much comparative good, cannot be questioned. It has been admitted even by infidels. Every succeeding age saw a multitude of individuals, animated by new desires, and guided by new principles, whose wills and inclinations were progressively brought into subjection to a law purer and more spiritual than had been ever known before; their views enlarged; their philosophy enlightened and elevated; their pursuits directed from an unsatisfying search after present good to the attainment of everlasting happiness; their selfish feelings subdued, and a spirit of real philanthropy infused in their stead. That this process should have been carried on in individuals, without affecting the general character and welfare of nations at large, would be no less contrary to the natural order of things, than to the testimony of experience. Contrast a christian community with an

heathen community, or even with the Jewish people before our Lord's advent; and there will be no difficulty in recognising the uniform tendency of the doctrines of the gospel, even where their saving power is not experienced, to ameliorate the condition of all classes of mankind. Their operation on society, like their operation on the personal character, is often so defective, as to disappoint our hopes; for among nations, as among individuals, the triumph of the principles of christianity is very gradual. But wherever they have been received, there has been a sensible improvement—an improvement which, however imperfect in degree and in extent, may still be marked and felt—and which prepares the mind to conceive the happiness of that latter day, when the tree, springing from the smallest of all seeds, shall have shot forth its branches, and overspread the whole earth, so that all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

1. But, however slow and partial has been the effect of Christ's ministry, the enemies of the gospel have never been able to deduce from this fact any inference unfavourable to the pretensions of its divine author. On the contrary, by predicting the little success which would at first attend his doctrines, (a step which no other teacher

of a new religious system has ever ventured to take,) Christ confirmed the authenticity of his own mission by the very circumstance which would have been fatal to the claims of an impostor. He did not deceive himself, or impose on others, by leading them to entertain hopes which the course of events would not finally justify. He told them without disguise, that "narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;" and that "many are called, but few chosen."[1]

It is true he promised his disciples, that they should do greater works than he had done; but lest they should be elated by this assurance, he qualifies it by an open declaration, that their doctrines would not be welcomed or obeyed—"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." And again he warns them in still stronger terms—"They shall put you out of the synagogue; yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."[2] On the supposition, therefore, that the apostles believed their Master's words, they could not have hoped to reap popularity from the execution of their ministe-

[1] Matt. vii. 14; xx. 16. [2] John xv. 20; xvi. 2.

rial office; and if they met with sufferance, it would be acknowledged with thankfulness as a good which they had no reason to expect. So far, then, from feeling their faith shaken in consequence of the rejection of the christian doctrines by the great majority of those who heard them, whether Jew or gentile, they would only perceive in this fact the fulfilment of prophecy, and a strong additional confirmation of the truth of their Master. As men, they might be discouraged and dejected; but as christians, they would rejoice in tribulations, and consider the present distress as an earnest of future glory.

For ourselves, we may learn to estimate the strength of that conviction, which could animate men to struggle in a despised cause, not only against incidental opposition, but against foreseen and certain persecution—and to persevere, in spite of penalties and imprisonments, even unto death, in the propagation of a religion, the triumphs of which they distinctly knew it was destined they should never witness.

2. Our Lord's ministry, considered in its effects, reveals the truest source of encouragement for those who watch over the souls of others as men who must give account. It teaches them where and when to look for the reward of their work—and that though the

"bread" be sometimes apparently "cast upon the waters," yet the faithful labourer will not eventually toil without a recompense, and shall find it again "after many days."[3] "We must not conclude," says Baxter, "that all the seed is lost, which seemeth buried, and appeareth not to us."[4] And another says—"We are not proper judges of the good that is done by us. Very often we are not to know it; it would puff us up."[5]

In order, however, to prevent perpetual disappointment, we must learn to extend our views. To seek for the real harvest produced by spiritual labours, only in their immediate and visible results, would be not less absurd than to take our measure of infinite space from that limited prospect which the mortal eye can reach, or to estimate the never-ending ages of eternity by a transitory moment of present time. In all such cases we must remember what is written, "Surely there is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off."[6] We must not pronounce on unfinished work. The waiting for the day which shall declare the result of things—"here is the patience and the faith of

[3] Eccles. xi. 1.

[4] *Treatise on Obedient Patience.* Works, vol. xi. p. 486.

[5] *Venn's Correspondence,* p. 366.

[6] Prov. xxiii. 18.

the saints."[7] Mr. Scott perceived the effects of his ministry at Olney much more evidently some years after his removal from the parish, than at the time. He remarks with his usual acuteness of observation that "a superficial gospel will almost always at first make more rapid progress, than the whole truth of revelation solidly proposed to mankind; (except at such seasons as that which followed the day of Pentecost;) but then these superficial effects die away, and gradually come to little, whereas the less apparent effect of the whole truth abides and increases permanently."[8] This indeed is a subject, on which the ordinary calculations of human sagacity are often confounded, and where God shews plainly, that his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. He often withdraws an agent, at the very crisis when his usefulness begins to be apparent—as if to shew more forcibly that he needs not the ministrations of man as a channel for the communication of his grace. But there is a remarkable passage, John iv. 36—38, worthy the attention of all ministers, which seems to give some insight into the plan of God's dealings in these mysterious dispensations. "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both

[7] Rev. xiii. 10. *Life of the Rev. T. Scott*, p. 465.

[8] *Scott's Life*, p. 250.

he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours." It would appear to the foolishness of human wisdom, that, where much labour was bestowed, there would be a proportionate return—where the talent employed in the service of Christ was great, the effect would also be important and in large measure. But Providence has ordered, that the battle shall not be always to the strong, or the race to the swift, as men count strength and swiftness. "The wisdom of God sees it fit that all his servants in the work of the ministry do not meet with the same difficulties, nor enjoy the same success. Some are laborious sowers, others joyful reapers; some labour all their days with little visible success; others bring in many to Christ, perhaps by a single sermon; some labour even with weariness, and reap little: others enter into their labours and reap much."[9]

There is a tendency also in men of sanguine

9 *Burkitt* on John iv. 36—38. Mr. Venn writes of Adam of Wintringham — "Exceedingly small was his success amongst his people, after preaching the gospel thirty years." —*Correspondence*, p. 380.

minds to exaggerate their discouragements, if the measure of their visible success seem to fall short of their expectations. There is much good sense in the advice given on this subject by a close observer of the human mind, to whom it sometimes happened in the course of his own long and laborious ministry, to toil in the work of the Lord amid apparent disappointment and failure. "This I am convinced is a temptation to which you are peculiarly exposed, and peculiarly accessible: yet if it once get fast hold of your mind, it will have a very unfavourable effect on the aggregate of your usefulness in future life . . . . . beware then of that discouragement which (to use your own word) tends to paralyze your efforts . . . . . Even at Ravenstone I remember complaining in a new year's sermon, that for a whole twelvemonth I had seen no fruit of my preaching; yet it appeared, within the course of the next twelvemonth, that not less than ten or twelve had been brought to consider their ways during that discouraging year; besides others, I trust, that I did not know of."[1] Facts, like these, are loud in teaching the useful lesson "that a very discouraging course, properly sustained, may eventually prove useful beyond all expectation." "A little good one year, and a little good another year,

[1] *Scott's Life*, p. 385.

amounts to much good in a course of years." [2]

Impatience under apparent want of success is a very common, but a very dangerous ministerial trial. It paralyzes where there is rather need of increased activity, and a more vivid act of faith. "Our business is to work and to wait. We shall know hereafter, though now we know not, why there is given from above a vehement desire to do good to souls, and glorify the name of Jesus, yet the preachers who feel it do no more good." "Be not discouraged if you see the people little affected for a time. I was here nine months before one person of this village came, of his own accord, to speak to me about his spiritual concerns. Christ's ministers must bear the contradiction of sinners against themselves, and wait with all long-suffering, as He did; and with respect to the most, they may say at last, 'I have stretched forth my hands, all the day long, to a disobedient and gainsaying people.'" [3]

[2] *Scott's Life*, p. 218, 439.

[3] *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 355, 357. The following striking passage from the same work is to the same purport: "You have no cause to be discouraged, that you yet see no fruit. How little, in comparison, have the ablest, brightest ministers ever seen, in comparison, I say, of what they might expect! Hear what the good shepherd and only infallible

It often happens, indeed, that God withholds his blessing for a time, that, when the net is cast "on the right side," it may be clearly seen that "the multitude of fishes" are of the Lord's giving; lest men should attribute their success to a wrong cause, and should "sacrifice unto their own net," and "burn incense unto their

preacher saith—'All the day long have I stretched forth my hands to a gainsaying and disobedient people.' When he opened the eyes of the blind in vast numbers, a very small part, even of them, beheld his glory! When he cleansed at once ten lepers, one only gave God thanks! When he made the lame, by thousands, to walk, scarcely any of them would follow him! Shall then the servant wonder his word is treated as was his Lord's? 'Yet,' saith he, 'though Israel be not gathered, I shall be glorious.' So each of his pastors may say; though after many prayers and tears, and much crying unto God, and setting plainly before the people the way of life in Christ crucified, I find scarcely any one that will receive my testimony, whilst I, in my own example, do honour the gospel. Shall I conclude I am not sent of the Lord? Shall I be disquieted and miserable? By no means! The purposes of God will be surely answered; and not the minister who has most success in his preaching shall stand highest in the day of the Lord; but the minister whose eye has been single; whose prayers have been fervent; whose bowels of mercies have been yearning over the ignorant, and those who are out of the way; and who has most readily sacrificed his own will and temporal interest. Such are conformable to Christ; and upon such he will put the greatest honour."—p. 365.

own drag."[4] We are not to faint and be weary in doing our own work, though another agent may be raised up, to whom a larger measure of success and talents of greater influence may seem to have been dealt. John did not slacken in his own appointed sphere of action, though "all men came unto Christ." He rather mourned that the unspeakable gift of God had not been more thankfully received by his prejudiced countrymen. "What he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth," exclaimed the holy Baptist; "but no man receiveth his testimony."[5] And when his disciples, through their affection for their first master, were slow to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah, he took every opportunity of drawing off their attention from himself, and of magnifying the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

But besides this, every minister who is attentive to the effects produced by his ministry, will perceive that there are ebbs and flows in his usefulness, and that the same apparent means are far from uniformly causing the same results. These fluctuations, whenever they occur, should lead him seriously to inquire, whether they are in any degree imputable either to himself, or to causes over which he has any controul. "It is the Spirit of God alone that

[4] Habak. i. 16. [5] John iii. 32.

can reveal the truth to us, when we are in error; but surely he should suspect that all is not right when he finds his flock deserting him."[6] They may arise, on his own part, from a diminution of zeal—from a wrong direction of la-

[6] *Memoirs of Rev. Legh Richmond*, p. 576. Baxter has some striking observations on the want of ministerial success. "Through God's great mercy it is not my own trial: I know not that ever I laboured any where in vain; but I have lived near far better men, who have lived to above fourscore years of age, and have said that they know not of two souls converted by them in the parishes where they lived: some speed better upon such as came from other parishes, and some on very few at all. And, alas! to see no better fruit of our employment, than merely to have a benefice to live on, and some reverence from the people, or a few good words, is a poor encouragement.

"But, 1, The first thing to be done in this sad case, is to search whether the fault be not in ourselves. Whether we choose such subjects to preach on as are most suitable to the hearers' state, and most fit to convince and win them: whether we study plainness and familiar words, and a close convincing way of speech: whether by familiar conversation with them we get their love, and also find out their ignorance, error, and sin, their objections and doubts, that we may know what they need; and whether we deal with them privately and personally as well as publicly, for their instruction: whether our lives preach to them as well as our tongues, and shew them that we believe what we speak; and whether we do all in the expression of unfeigned love, and do them all the good we can for their bodies, and quarrel not with them for worldly things, but lose our right rather than scandalize them, and

bours—from a partial or imperfect distribution of the divine word—from remissness in securing his people's affection—or from many causes of a similar kind, which will readily occur to any attentive observer of the effects of influence rightly exerted on the human mind. Or they may arise from extraneous causes, but yet over which it is in our power to exercise a legitimate and salutary restraint; such, for example, as the prevalence of some local irregularity which may be remedied—some seducing example which may be removed—some ensnaring circumstances, the recurrence of which may be avoided in future by a little pains and foresight.

There are other causes of defection, which the parochial priest must expect to encounter, and which do not discredit his faithfulness. They are often found to occur, not only among those who yield to the natural alienation of the heart from the truth, but among those whose prejudices on particular points indispose them to parts of ministerial teaching, as well as among those whose evil deeds shrink from the light, and will not bear exposure, even to themselves. There are hearers who will not let their spiritual pastors tell them more than half the word

harden them against the truth. If any of this be amiss, it must be amended."—*Treatise on Obedient Patience.* Works, xi. 484.

of God, or more than they know, or think they know already. Witness the diminution in the congregation at the Lock chapel, when the preacher, in the course of his exposition of the epistle to the Ephesians, proceeded to unfold and apply those parts which treat of christian tempers and relative duties.[7] The truth is, that whoever pricks the conscience of his hearers closely, without producing repentance, will soon find them either absentees from his ministry, or unwilling listeners, if not open opponents. When the pharisees, "who were covetous," heard our Lord's declarations against the love of money, "they derided him."[8] After he had delivered the parable of the vineyard "they sought to lay hold on him . . . . for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them."[9] Whenever the gospel is not "the savour of life unto life," it becomes "the savour of death unto death" to them that hear it.[1]

But there is no reason for discouragement, if, after a conscientious survey of the whole case, it should appear that its peculiar symptoms cannot fairly be referred to any of these sources of disorder. Our Lord's own ministry was itself subject to interruptions, owing to the way-

[7] *Life of Scott*, p. 232—237.
[8] Luke xvi. 14.
[9] Mark xii. 12.
[1] 2 Cor. ii. 16.

wardness of his hearers. At his first entrance upon his office, all flocked around him.[2] Yet we speedily find him appealing to the twelve, when many of the disciples went back and walked no more with him, whether they also would go away.[3] Elsewhere he contrasts their faithfulness with the inconstancy of others—"Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations."[4]

Desertion therefore may take place without fault of our own, and if this be the case we must wait patiently for the troubling of the water—the seasons which God chooses for the manifestation of his sovereign power—and watch the moment for putting in the impotent folk, that they may reap the benefits of his extraordinary grace and mercy.[5] And when we are tempted to complain that hopeful characters do not answer our expectation, let it be remembered that the times and seasons of grace, as of nature, are in God's hands. The sifting time comes, and the unstable professor falls away; or the time of conviction comes, and the repentant sinner returns to his right mind. As the fig-tree is sometimes seen to be dried up from the roots, so is the dry rod sometimes seen to bud and blossom in a single night.[6]

[2] Matt. iv. 25.
[3] John vi. 67.
[4] Luke xxii. 28.
[5] John v. 4.
[6] Numb. xvii. 8. Mark xi. 20.

St. Paul himself, whose labours as an apostle were more blessed than any of his fellow-workers, met with many cases of defection, even among those who at first heard him gladly. He expostulates warmly with some of the Galatians who "did run well," but had been "bewitched" in suffering themselves to be led away again from the faith in which they had been instructed. "My temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"[7] Among the hearers of Titus at Crete were some who professed that they knew God, but in works

[7] Gal. iv. 14—16. This is a remarkable passage, and may perhaps contain a clue to the meaning of the "thorn in the flesh," of which the apostle complains. None of the explanations given of it by the commentators are satisfactory. See Bp. Bull's Sermon on 2 Cor. xii. 7—9, where the opinions of the fathers and others are fully stated. They who explain it of the natural infirmity of man in his fallen state, to which St. Paul was subject in common with others, do not seem to advert to the form of expression used in this passage. The apostle does not say, "my temptation which was in *the* flesh," as it is twice inaccurately quoted by Paley, *Horæ Paulinæ*, Epistle to the Galatians, No. iv.—but "in *my* flesh," ἐν τῇ

denied him.[8] Other passages of the epistles also shew, that even among the earliest churches

[8] Tit. i. 16.

σαρκί μου. And why should the Galatians "despise" him for a weakness from which they were not exempt themselves? They who are of opinion that it was some defect in his speech which impeded his utterance, or rendered it ungraceful, appear to forget that, at Lystra, Paul was called Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. It is more probable that it was some external blemish in his person, perhaps weakness of sight, or some affection or involuntary movement of the eyes, which rendered him contemptible to the multitude, and was thus likely to injure his usefulness. This hypothesis will give a rational meaning to the proof of the love of the Galatians towards him, instanced by the apostle, for the explanation of which the quotations usually brought forward, (*Ni te plus oculis meis amarem*, &c.) are quite irrelevant. "I bear you record, that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me." How would such an action have been any proof of love? unless the supposed gift had been intended to supply some deficiency under which the apostle was known to labour. But it would have been indeed a great token of attachment if the Galatians could have remedied his natural failing, by depriving themselves of the faculty of sight to restore it to him.

We may also account on the same supposition for another peculiarity in St. Paul's history. It is known that he generally employed an amanuensis, for which no better reason has been assigned than the assertion, unsupported by any proof, that the apostle was unable to write the Greek characters. But was it likely that one on whose education no expense was spared, should have remained ignorant of a language so ne-

which were formed, there were not a few who made shipwreck of their faith, and drew back

cessary to a Jew of liberal birth, especially at a time when many Greeks came yearly to Jerusalem for commercial or religious purposes? Besides, he quoted passages from three at least, and probably from four Greek poets, which proves familiarity with their writings.[1] Now if we suppose that his eye-sight was affected, all the difficulty vanishes, and an intelligible reason is suggested for his requiring the aid of an assistant.

Again, when the high priest Ananias ordered Paul to be smitten, he retorted on him, as upon an ordinary pharisee—"God shall smite thee, thou whited wall"—but when informed who it was that had spoken, he excused himself by saying, "I wist not that he was the high priest." The commentators account for his ignorance in various ways, but they leave the great difficulty untouched, since the seat and dress of the high priest would have been sufficient evidence of his dignity in the eyes of a Jew, if eyes he had. But if St. Paul's infirmity

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[1] From Aratus, Acts xvii. 28; from Menander, 1 Cor. xv. 33; from Epimenides, Tit. i. 12. With respect to the first quotation the apostle says, τινες των καθ' ὑμας ποιητων εἰρηκασι —an expression literally indicating more than one—and the words, with the alteration of a single letter, are to be found in a hymn of Cleanthus to Jupiter. That the apostle designed to speak of more than one is probable, for in Tit. i. 12, he says, τις ἐξ αὐτων. Bp. Marsh in his notes to Michaelis, vol. i. p. 429, names Callimachus as the poet here quoted by St. Paul. There is a verse in Callimachus which begins Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, but it proceeds differently; and Callimachus was not a Cretan but a Cyrenian.—See *Dodd's Translation of Callimachus's Hymns*, p. 3, note.

unto perdition. Some, of whom particular hopes seem to have been entertained, are mentioned by

prevented him from *seeing* the position in the council, or the external emblems of office which indicated the high station of the speaker, a clear solution of the mystery is provided; and the validity of the apostle's apology for his hasty expression may be admitted by us, as, from the silence of the sacred historian, it seems to have been by the assembly. Acts xxiii. 1—5.

The word used in the original, in the first verse of this latter passage, deserves notice. Ἀτενίσας δὲ ὁ Παῦλος τῷ συνεδρίῳ, "Paul, earnestly beholding the council." Now ἀτενίζειν τινι, vel εἰς τι, vel εἰς τινα, is "aliquid vel aliquem oculis valde intentis contueri"—Valckenarius, Act. cap. i.—who speaks of its being used by Hippocrates. This intent fixing of the look is precisely what might be expected to accompany weak or imperfect vision.

In the passage in Corinthians, the word used is σκόλοψ—ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, "a thorn in the flesh." (2 Cor. xii. 7.) Now in Numbers xxxiii. 55, it is said that the inhatants which are suffered to remain shall be σκόλοπες ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, "pricks in your eyes." In Joshua xxiii. 13, "thorns" in the eyes occur in our English version. The word is different in the Hebrew and Septuagint from that used in Numbers, but both are translated "spinæ" by Xantis Pagninus and Tremellius and Junius.

To strengthen the hypothesis which has been advanced, I remark, lastly, that it serves to explain the expression πήλικα γράμματα, Gal. vi. 11, which, it is observable, occurs in the same epistle with the passage which has given occasion to this note. M'Knight on this passage remarks, that Beza, Le Clerc, Beausobre, Wolf, and Lardner, agree with our translators in rendering the words "how large a letter," and he fol-

name. Of this class were Hymenæus and Alexander, with whose fall the apostle acquaints

lows their version. At the same time he allows that Whitby, Doddridge, and others, following Jerome, Chrysostom, and Theophylact, translate the words "with what kind of letter," supposing it to be an apology for the inelegance of the writing. This is beneath the seriousness of the occasion, and the character of the writer, as well as inconsistent with the spirit of the passage. May not the words be interpreted with more propriety by referring them to the size of the letters? which, if St. Paul laboured under the infirmity I have supposed, would be of a larger character than customary; and the unusual trouble which he took on this occasion, by writing with his own hand, notwithstanding the defect in his vision, with which the Galatians must have been well acquainted, would shew his anxiety for their faith, and the importance he attached to the subject of his letter.

A singular coincidence of conjecture has been pointed out to me in Mr. Roberts's recent publication of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More. In the third volume of this work, a letter is printed from the late Mr. Stephen to Mrs. Martha More, from which the following are extracts.

"Does it fall within the plan or general character of the work (Mrs. More's Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of St. Paul) to notice the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, and to give any conjecture as to the infirmity alluded to? I have an interpretation of this, which, as far as my reading, or that of Wilberforce and some others goes, is original, and yet it is admitted by them to be as probable, or more so, than any other of the many conjectures they have seen. For my own part, I hold it almost demonstrably the true solution. St. Paul's infirmity was one well-known in hot

Timothy.[9] And again—"All they which are in Asia are turned away from me, of whom are

[9] 1 Tim. i. 15.

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climates, a chronical ophthalmia. . . . . Hence he generally employed an amanuensis, and regarded it as a great matter when he used his own pen. 'Ye see,' &c. (Gal. vi. 11.) 'The salutation,' &c. (1 Cor. xvi. 21.)

"That the infirmity was of a bodily kind seems quite indisputable. . . . . The choice of the metaphor weighs much with me; indeed it first excited my conjecture. The pain of ophthalmia, when severe, exactly resembles that of a thorn or pin. I once had it very severely indeed in the West Indies. It made me blind in a manner for about three weeks, and during that time, if a ray of light by any means broke into my darkened chamber, it was like a thorn or pin run into my eye, and so I often described it. I felt also the subsequent effect for years, which I suppose to have been experienced by St. Paul, a predisposition to inflammation in the eyes, which extreme care and timely applications prevented from recurring. . . . . But the strongest argument of all remains, and appears to me nearly, if not quite, decisive. It rests upon Gal. iv. 15. After praising them in the preceding verse, for not despising his fleshly infirmity, (whatever that was,) he here subjoins, "I bear you record," &c. How natural this context on my hypothesis! How little so on any other! . . . . Let us take, for instance, Doddridge's conjecture. 'You saw my paralytic distortions in my mouth and cheeks, you heard my stammering tongue, when I first preached the gospel to you; but you despised not those infirmities. On the contrary, you would, if it had been possible, have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.'

Phygellus and Hermogenes."[1] Ecclesiastical history abounds with instances of similar apostasy. May they serve as warnings!

3. The example of Christ may teach the pastor that, even under the trial of a discouraging ministry, the mind must not give way to weariness, or sink under apathy. No alternative is left to his option; he is under a holy constraint. As upon St. Paul, "necessity is laid upon him."[2]

Who indeed can estimate the guilt of a lukewarm ministry? Indifference is fatal to souls. "He that is not with me, is against me: and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth."[3] If the supine shepherd suffer the flock of God to be led

[1] 2 Tim. i. 15. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 16.
[3] Luke xi. 23.

"Suppose lameness, &c. . . . the incongruity is not much, if at all less. . . . The point, after all, is of no great importance; but if Mrs. H. More thinks it worth while to notice the guesses on this subject at all, here is what I suppose to be a new one, for her consideration."

Mrs. Hannah More remarks in her reply—"If your interpretation is not true, though I believe verily it is, it is at least ingenious enough to deserve to be true. The evidence from Galatians is, I think, irresistible."

The letter from which the foregoing extracts are taken, the whole of which is worth consulting, is dated Dec. 29th, 1814; but was not published until last year. The substance of this note appeared in the first edition of the present work in 1824.

astray by others, he must not hold himself guiltless, because another and not himself is the leader. He virtually disperses, if he does not gather into the fold of Christ. In fact, a zeal for God's house seems to belong properly to the character of a minister. Even if it be so ardent as to "eat him up,"[4] he will but the more resemble Christ, so that a spirit of divine wisdom guide him. Meekness becomes him also; but he must not let his meekness extinguish his zeal when the occasion should call it forth. It was said more than fifty years ago, of a servant of God yet living, "Oh to flame, as he does, with zeal, and yet be beautified with meekness!"[5]

Nor must the fervent affections of the pastor end, except with his life. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."[6] Christ preached openly at the feast of the passover immediately before his death, and continued teaching and praying with his disciples up to the very hour when he was betrayed—"While he yet spake, lo, Judas .... came, and with him a great multitude."[7]

4. We may trace in Christ's ministry some of the sources of that influence which is granted to the faithful labours of the clergy.

The days indeed are past, when the clergy

[4] John ii. 17.
[5] *Venn's Correspondence*, p. 345.
[6] Luke xii. 43.
[7] Matt. xxvi. 47.

held dominion over the secular policy of the world, as well as over God's spiritual heritage. That dominion was not so much the legitimate ascendancy of character, as the despotic supremacy of exclusive knowledge over ignorance, and its associate, error. It was rather the offspring of a monopoly of learning in an age of darkness, than the fair superiority acquired by talent and virtue in a field of open and honourable competition. Neither was it used so much for the benefit and comfort of others—the legitimate end of power and influence—as for the advantage and personal aggrandisement of the possessors. But "the superstitious reverence for the priesthood, and a credulity that seemed to invite imposture,"[8] which, according to the historian of the time, were the characteristics of the unenlightened devotion of those ages, were too blind and slavish in their nature to be permanent. That spell, therefore, has been long broken, and, as it frequently happens, a reaction of feeling has succeeded, which may be still more dangerous to the interests of the community than the former error.

Yet if this alienation of sentiment from a particular religious body were the natural consequence of ecclesiastical usurpation, the church of Christ must not forget, that it has a right to

[8] *Hallam's Hist. of the Middle Ages,* ii. 200, 222.

challenge respect and influence, of a more legitimate and beneficial nature, on scriptural grounds. All the ministers of our own branch of that church have been solemnly charged so to sanctify the lives of themselves and of their families, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that they may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow. They cannot overlook the highly interesting fact, that on the influential character of that body to which they belong, the moral constitution of society, as well as the more direct interests of religion, vitally depends.

Nor is this general principle affected by particular exceptions. There will always be many individuals in the ministry wholly unequal to the responsibility of giving a tone to public opinion, and regulating the standard of morals; —but in a large and comprehensive view, there will be a sure, though not always immediate, or even obvious result, corresponding with the nature of the impression given to the community by their spiritual directors. It was no religious bigot who observed—"It ever was and ever will be true, in all nations, under all manners and customs, no priesthood—no letters, no humanity; and reciprocally again, society, laws, government, learning—a priesthood."[9]

[9] *Bentley's Remarks on a late discourse on Freethinking*, Part ii.

A principal source of this influence arises from the honour which God thinks fit to confer on the dispensers of his word and sacraments. The certain Greeks who desired to see Jesus at the feast, were brought into his presence through the medium of the apostle Philip.[1] Philip himself had the honour of a personal call from Christ; but Nathanael was called by Philip, as was Andrew by John, and Peter by Andrew.[2] God permits the distribution of his mercies to pass through the hands of his servants, as in feeding the five thousand, Christ gave to his disciples that they might communicate to the multitude.[3] He could supply his people himself with spiritual sustenance, but, in his ordinary operations at least, he chooses rather to divide the bread of life among them by means of the constituted stewards of his mysteries. Undoubtedly he also conveys the knowledge of himself by the direct ministration of his Holy Spirit—but he generally prefers to employ the agency of his ministers.[4] He could have given his revelations to the churches directly, without the interposition

[1] John xii. 20—22. [2] John i. 41, 43, 45.

[3] Matt. xv. 36.

[4] "Potest ille quidem ex ipsis viarum silicibus sibi excitare filios Abrahæ. Nec quisquam dubitat, quin hoc quoque majora possit. Sed ita visum est illius incomprehensibili sapientiæ, per homines hominibus largiri sua dona."—*Erasmi Ecclesiastes.*

of a messenger; but he preferred to signify them through his servant John.[5] The Corinthian converts, had it so pleased the eternal wisdom, might have received of the Lord personally, without the intervention of Paul's ministry, that which the apostle delivered to them by the divine command.[6] He could have conveyed immediately to the mind of the Æthiopian eunuch the true meaning of Isaiah's prophecy; but he rather chose to send Philip to instruct him by an oral communication.[7] He could have enlightened the eyes of Paul's mind by the same "light from heaven," which arrested him on his journey; but he thought fit to commission "a certain disciple" to give him an insight into the fulness of the riches of that grace of which he was to be made a chosen vessel.[8] The same observation also applies to the case of Cornelius and St. Peter.[9] And, now that immediate declarations of God's will have ceased, it is by his blessing on the delivery of the written word that we are instructed, through the medium of those "earthen vessels," which are set apart for the keeping of the heavenly treasure. Hence the apostle intimates the necessity of a standing mi-

[5] Rev. i. 1. [6] 1 Cor. xi. 23.
[7] Acts viii. 26—35. [8] Acts ix. 3—19.
[9] Acts x. 3—33.

nistry in the church.[1] Without it, he seems to affirm that there can be no belief, no salvation. Its members, therefore, on whom rests the deep responsibility of being the depositaries of the divine will, and the channels for the communication of grace, must see that their "lips keep knowledge." They must take heed not to "teach for doctrines the commandments of men," but to declare with faithfulness and authority—"Thus saith the Lord God."

But, above all, the moral weight of the clergy, in their several spheres, arises, under the divine blessing, from the holiness of their lives. It was, in part, the personal holiness of our Lord, as contrasted with the hypocrisy of the scribes, which enabled him to speak as one having authority to the deniers of his divine mission. And had the enemies of St. Paul found any thing to object against the purity of his life, he would not have been brought before four successive tribunals, to defend himself from nothing more than the frivolous charge of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."[2]

And, if the policy of a mere worldly wisdom could teach pagan philosophers to require virtue in an orator, how much more strongly does the gospel require of a preacher, that "he should behave himself holily, justly, and un-

[1] Rom. x. 14, 15. [2] Acts xxii. 26; xxiv. 5.

blameably among them that believe."[3] The canons of the primitive church—documents valuable for the light they throw on the manners of the first ages of christianity—interdict all who had done public penance from admission to holy orders. And if a rule so rigid evinces the value which the Fathers attached to the irreproachable lives of the clergy, enough may be gleaned from the scanty notices of ecclesiastical history to testify the wisdom of their judgment, and to show the veneration and authority with which man is invested, even in his fallen state, by sanctity of character. One early instance occurs in the title given to an apostle on account of his virtues, by a people, whose prejudices were violently opposed to the principles on which those very virtues were founded. Josephus himself does not scruple to confess his conviction, that the distress which fell upon his nation in the destruction of their city, was a penal judgment for the martyrdom of James the Just. "For," says the historian, "the Jews slew him, though a very just man."

Another enemy of christianity, and one who knew it well, as he had once been enlisted under its banners, affords his testimony to the same truth. The Emperor Julian attributed so much of the success of the gospel to the strict

[3] 1 Thess. ii. 10.

lives of its clergy, that he gives direction in two of his epistles respecting the serious tempers and deportment of the heathen priests, referring to the conduct of the christian pastors for an example of the policy he recommends to paganism. There is no testimony to the beauty of true holiness more impressive, than that which is thus borne by the involuntary awe excited by it in those, who, while they approve its excellence, hate what they are constrained to admire. Herod, from a full conviction that John "was a just man and an holy," "feared" him.[4] It is a glorious trophy raised to religion, when the adorning display of christian graces is such as to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to engage the esteem of those who are condemned by it. No greater tribute was ever paid to the constraining influence of the doctrines of the cross, than when it was remarked of some of the primitive believers—"See how these christians love one another!" They were all preachers, as it were, by the spirit which they evinced; and doubtless won over many, by the silent energy of their example, to exclaim—We will go with you, for we perceive that "God is in you of a truth."[5]

But in tracing the sources of an effective ministry, care must be taken not to attach too

[4] Mark vi. 20. [5] 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

much importance to secondary causes. It should never be forgotten that all honour comes of God, and that it is he alone that gives the increase. Except the Lord keep the souls of his people, the watchman waketh but in vain. "Behold," saith he to each of his humblest ministers, as of old to the angel of the church of Philadelphia, "I have set before thee an open door."[6]

There is also a danger of another kind, to which the clergy, as a body, are peculiarly exposed. Though, by the divine command, they are to be patterns to the world of the rule and doctrine of Christ, yet their duties must not be performed solely for the sake of setting an example. Influence is desirable for a clergyman, as one of the talents which may be successfully used for the salvation of souls. But it must not be so sought as if it were mistaken for the end of his being. It is nothing more than one of the instruments for his work, by which he is to build up his people in Christ, and stablish them in the faith. Ministers, therefore, who enjoy the love of their flock, must be cautious lest they obstruct the glorification of their heavenly Father, by suffering themselves to become too exclusively the idols of their charge. Their influence, although at first productive of much seeming religious obe-

[6] Rev. iii. 8.

dience, will cease after a time to have the same effect, if it flow from a love of the individual, rather than from a sense of the service which God requires on his own account. It is written for our instruction, that "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest," but after the death of his teacher and guide, "he hearkened unto the princes of Judah."[7] And even had sacred history been silent respecting his subsequent declension from the paths of virtue, other instances are but too frequent of unstable men who have forsaken "their first love," when the cause has been removed which kept them for a time in the form of knowledge, and the outward semblance of obedience. But, as it is natural for those who have benefited by a ministry to love the instrument by which a good work has been wrought in their hearts, advantage should be taken of that love to elevate and fix it on its proper object. "See here," says Quesnel, "the perfect pattern of an evangelical preacher . . . . . To make his reputation and the confidence of the people subservient, not to his own interest, but to the good of souls, and to the establishing the kingdom of God."[8] When

[7] 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 17. Compare also Judg. ii. 7—11.

[8] On Matt. iv. 23—25.

men's eyes are fastened on the earthly agents, they should be directed to transfer their affections to him, who gives the blessing on human labours. They should hear, as from the mouth of Peter, "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power of holiness we had made this man to walk?"[9] After the manner of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, the people should be restrained that they do not sacrifice unto us,—men of like passions with themselves,—but be led to "turn from these vanities unto the living God."[1]

It is a disinterestedness of this kind, and an abstraction from personal feeling, which can alone give a ministry its proper direction and due effect. The operating motive must be drawn from scripture, and formed on the obligations of duty; for it is only by attention to the principle on which actions are performed, that vital religion can be preserved. And on this point, as on every other essential particular relative to the christian ministry, that principle, which ought to be the regulating motive, stands exhibited so plainly, by example as well as precept, in the life and doctrines of the divine prophet of the church, that it cannot be mistaken—

[9] Acts iii. 12. [1] Acts xiv. 11—18.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." [2]

[2] Matt. v. 16.

THE END.

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